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NOW!

TRANSMIGRATION.

BY

[illegible]

AUTHOR OF

"MARQUIS AND MERCHANT"

&c. &c.

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar."

WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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TRANSMIGRATION.

CHAPTER I.

WIMBLEDON.

Χίλια 'ετη ὡς ἡμέρα μία.

S. Peter.

Ere we knew what the cause
Of a vacuum was,
It was made by a baby for *Γαστήρ.*

Lord Neaves.

I, EDWARD ELLESMERE, died at Beau Sejour, on Five Tree Hill, at seven in the afternoon of the 29th of June, 1840, being Saint Peter's Day, and a Monday.

I, Reginald Marchmont, was born at

Marchmont Lodge, Wimbledon, at eleven in the evening of the 29th of June, 1840, being Saint Peter's Day, and a Monday.

The interval passed in the planet Mars is to me utterly inexplicable. I leave it to the metaphysical reader.

My second experience of the world was without parallel. I was lying in a cradle in an airy nursery, lighted from above. I seemed of a rather red complexion. I looked around at things in general, having an unforgotten experience of the world, and observed that there was another cradle near me. There were several female folk about. One of them said, with a fine Irish brogue, which may be left to the reader's imagination,

"Well, I hope the master's satisfied now. He wanted a boy, and he's got two! Faith, it's the height of good luck."

As I lay there, amid lavendered linen, the situation dawned on me. I was born again, without forgetting my past. Most babies have forgotten everything: I had forgotten nothing. If my father were to come and quote Horace to me, I could give him the next line. But, remembering that this is a prejudiced age, I decided to keep very quiet at first. Besides, from the confabulation of the nurses, it would seem there was a twin . . . and I wanted to see that twin. So I turned round in my cradle and fell asleep.

By-and-by I was awaked by laughter, and a blue-eyed bright-haired little girl came dancing into the room. She looked quite a giantess to me in my cradle; she was three, at least. She romped about the place right pleasantly; her turquoise eyes suited her festucine hair; she laughed and sang and

played tricks of all sorts. I, with eyes wide open in my cradle, studied her philosophically. I was however very curious to know what my brother was like, in the other cradle. Had *he* any memory of the past? Or was he merely a common-place baby?

"Now, Miss Dot, don't you be troublesome," says one of the nurses. And Miss Dot is turned out of the nursery into some other room, and I fall back upon my pillow and reflect. I come to the conclusion that, for reflexion, there's nothing like a pillow.

I pass a lazy easy time of it, alternating between the soft cradle and the nurse's lap. Dot comes in and out. Dot is much interested in her little brothers. Dot little thinks that one of her little brothers is quite an old, old man. Dot reminds me

of somebody. Now who the devil is it?

O, I know. A great day arrives. Mamma is well enough to come to the nursery and look at her twins. Mamma comes; her husband and her husband's brother accompany her. Have I seen before those happy eyes beneath that radiant hair? Have I not? Why, it is Mavis Lee! But I, being a baby in a cradle, am perfectly quiet, and think what fun it will be when I tell her who I am, some day or other. Yes, little lovely Mavis Lee has married somebody . . . and I am her son. Do I regret it? Emphatically NO!

As I lay in my cradle that night, I became ontological and psychological. Mavis Lee, not long ago, was a little girl that I petted; now she's Mamma: which view of her character am I to take? Few places are more favourable for reflexion than a

cradle. You pass from the nurse's soft arms to the sweet sheets amid the basket-work, and you say to yourself, "I'll leave prophecies to be solved to-morrow;" that's if you're an ordinary baby, under ordinary conditions. But I wanted to work out the exquisite identity of Mamma and Mavis. It was soon done.

I wish words could describe my feelings at this time. Here was I, who had known Mavis Lee (now Mavis Marchmont) a mere girl—and I was a ruddy baby in her mother-lap. I shared in her affection with my brother. I was the eldest by an instant—the heir, therefore, to the Marchmont business on the Stock Exchange, which . . . well, the less said of that "which" the better. Even in the cradle, I detested the Stock Exchange.

Nursery reminiscences become tiresome.

Let us move on. My father, with City cruelty, christened me Reginald, and my brother Algernon. My Uncle Paul (have I mentioned my Uncle Paul?) he was senior wrangler, and wrote Greek iambics like Sophocles, called me Rex for short. He didn't shorten Algernon's name; he didn't much care about Algernon. When he gave him a nickname, it was "Whiskers."

Could I only remember, with anything like accuracy, the experience of the cradle, with perfect knowledge of the past, and with my dear lovely Mavis for mamma, it would be an idyl inimitable. There was the fact—enough for me—God had renewed my youth, and given me to Mavis; she did not know it. She shall, when the true time comes.

It was very odd, this general relationship, which I alone understood. Dear Mavis—

the little girl! Dear Mamma—so sweet and kind! A pretty puzzle this. I had to conceal my knowledge. But the concealment grew more difficult when I had to deal with my brother Algy and my sister Kitty. While I was master of many languages, poor dear Algy couldn't read. I knew the world, though I looked a baby; Kitty knew nothing.

To lie in a cradle and gnaw a coral is, I think, as jolly as any method of wasting time I know. This I did. I was a marvel to myself; but Dot and Algy were to me greater marvels. It seemed incredible that I alone should possess any recollection of the world I had left. And where had my sister come from? Who had she been in the land she had left. Never did I tire of speculating on these questions; and the nursery authorities, surprised at the fact

that, while I laughed a great deal, and pondered a great deal, I never by any chance cried, pronounced me the best baby they had ever known. There was, however, one dissentient—Nurse Nora, who came from the isle of the shamrock, and was as full of traditions and legends as an egg of meat. She used to tell her English fellow-servants long stories in a whisper by the cosy nursery fire, when Kitty had been put to bed, and Algy and I were supposed to be asleep in our cradles. I soon found that I required much less sleep than an ordinary baby like my brother; and when Nora was tale-telling, I used to lie with my eyes shut, and listen to interminable stories of banshees, cluricaunes, fairy mounds, fairy treasure, and a thousand other imaginative superstitions of Ireland, familiar to those who have read Croften Croker's charming work.

One night, as thus I lay, Nora's whisper was rather lower than ever. She was talking about me. Little pitchers have long ears, and I caught all she said.

"That child's a changeling, I know. The good people have taken away the mistress's true son, and left one of themselves instead. O, I should like to try the brewery of eggshells upon him."

"Why, what's that, Nora?" whispered one of the girls.

"If you want to know if a child is a changeling, put a pot on the fire, and fill it with eggshells and water, and at the same time put the poker between the bars to get red-hot. Stir up the eggshells, and presently the baby 'll cry out, 'What's that you're doing, nurse?' 'I'm brewing eggshells, my darling,' says you. Then the fairy will say, 'Well, I'm nigh a thousand years old, and I never

heard of brewing eggshells yet!' Then you fetch the poker out of the fire, and run at the creature, and it'll vanish out of window, and in the cradle you'll find the right baby, smiling as peacefully as heart could wish."

I could see the English nursemaids—there were three—shuddering with half credulous fright. I was thinking all the time what fun it would be if I (who, of course, had as yet no right to talk) were to make, at the end of Nora's story, some startling remark. But my cradle-cogitations had determined me not to reveal my peculiar condition to any one—for a very long time, at least. I was partly actuated by the conviction that the world would vote me a lunatic if, when of sufficient age, I should proclaim the truth about myself . . . but chiefly by my desire to continue as long as possible in this highly rare, if not unprecedented incognito, and to

test thoroughly the effect on a human career of remembering the career which had gone immediately before it.

Still Nora's theory was so irresistible that I could not restrain a smothered laugh; and the way in which those servant-girls were startled thereby was amusing. They all jumped up to look at me. I was lying with my eyes wide open, calmly gazing on the ceiling. There were two or three ejaculations of surprise; but the Irish girl only shook her head mysteriously, as who should say, "You see I was right."

I believe the brewery of eggshells would have been tried, but Mamma was in and out of the nursery so often that the maids had no chance of attempting the experiment. But I could see Nora often gazing at me with a curious mixture of inquiry and dread. Evidently that imaginative little Irishwoman

had quite made up her mind that I was a changeling. It is creditable to the well-know acuteness of the Irish mind that she at least discovered that there was something in me different from other babies.

I go on now to the child life which I led with the kindest of mothers, and Dot the Second, and Algernon. It was as happy as health, love, and money could make it. It was passed, the first part of it, in my father's house at Wimbledon—a real mansion, that he had built himself, and furnished sumptuously.

CHAPTER II.

CHILD-LIFE.

"The child is father of the man."

REMINISCENCES of ordinary childhood in after-life are usually of a vague and dubious character. Indeed, the happy days of infancy are of so gossamer a texture that the hot sun of life's noon disperses it, as the morning cobwebs on the grass vanish in the heat of day. Unconscious happiness of this kind leaves no trace, except by moulding the mind and form, and causing the manners to be gentle, and the vision clear, and

the temper calm. But the early troubles of life are apt to leave unpleasant recollections: floggings and fevers, accidents and horrors, are apt to haunt the memory at intervals. A scar lasts as long as the body lasts; often indeed increases with age; but youthful happiness is simply shown in after-life by the absence of scars from both mind and body.

With me, in this my second avatar, things are different. Rambling about under the fine trees of our own large garden, or over the wide expanse of the Common, I noted down everything with an intellect as mature as when I studied under the unseen influence of Doctor Romayne. To my brother, and even to Kitty, the glassy pools of Wimbledon seemed great lakes; but I, though my small stature magnified them physically, was able, through an effort of comparison,

to make out their size pretty well. I had experienced something like it before, when, in the planet Mars, my vision lengthened, and I had to learn a new scale of distances. Besides, I had what may be called a unit of measurement. My mind's eye carried always the maiden, Mavis Lee: I saw that she was unaltered, save by a pleasant plumpness, in the matron, Mavis Marchmont. So I used Mamma as my standard, she, dear creature, little guessing that she was mathematically treated by her boy.

Not that I always treated her mathematically. Truth to say, the present often passed from my eyes, and I thought of Five Tree Hill and Saint Apollonia's Chapel by the laughing stream, and my pretty pupil, so loth to leave it all for the old-fashioned comfortable home of the sober stockbroking uncle. I marvelled what had become of

that uncle. He had not yet been mentioned in my hearing.

However, a day arrived when I beheld him again in the flesh. It should be premised that my father gave great entertainments to his city friends and clients at intervals—banquets at which were served wines of rare vintages, and where the cut flowers and dessert-fruit would cost fifty pounds at a time. I knew this, for I saw the preparations and heard the servants' gossip; and, as Algy and I lay in our two white beds, we used to hear the carriages driving to the door . . . the dinner hour usually being nine!

One summer day there was to be one of these festivities; and in the afternoon we three children, instead of being allowed to take our usual run upon the Common, were dressed up rather smartly, and taken by one

of the maids into the garden. On the lawn there is a great plane-tree, lovely as that which Xerxes hung with jewels priceless—for no tree grows more nobly in London and its vicinage than the Asiatic plane. Under this tree I beheld, pleasantly seated around a table, whereon were tall bottles of light wine, and plates of summer fruit, my father and mother, and uncle Paul . . . and Mr. Arundel Lee. Older and feebler than when I saw him last, he was yet unmistakeably the same. The lights and shadows dropt through the flat leaves, moved by a soft south wind, upon his bald head and gold-rimmed spectacles, upon my mother's soft fair hair, and the red rose in the bosom of her white dress, on my father's gay and jolly face, which always gave one the impression that stockbroking must be rather fun than otherwise, rather like a game of

[illegible] Uncle Paul's [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] saw everything close at hand. He may have been thinking of stars, but he never missed a flower.

"So these are the little people," said Mr. Arundel Lee. I found afterwards that he had been abroad for his health for some years, travelling from spa to spa, and so had never seen my brother and me. "The boys are not much alike for twins. I think this one's most like you, Mavis," he continued, putting his hand on my shoulders.

Now this set me thinking. I had often noticed that Algy was a deal more like Papa than I was. It suddenly occurred to me at this instant that, when little Mavis grew to be my pupil at Five Tree Hill, she came to

have a look in her eyes, an expression in her face, that reminded me of myself, as I appeared in a remarkably good miniature on ivory, taken when I was in the Guards. I remembered speculating on the formative power of mind over matter, and writing down some desultory thoughts thereon.

"There *is* a decided likeness about the eyes and mouth," said my uncle, thoughtfully; "but Dot's such an image of her mother, that I did not notice it till Mr. Lee saw it. As to Algy, he's the very picture of *you*, Charlie."

"I hope he'll do as well," quoth Mr. Lee. "It's early times to talk of such things, but I suppose you'll put both the youngsters on the Exchange?"

"There's nothing like it," said my father. "Still there is a matter to be considered, and that's a young fellow's natural capacity.

You and I, Mr. Lee, make our money easy enough. If Paul had gone on 'Change, though he's no end of a mathematician I'm told, he'd have ruined himself in a month. So I must wait till these heroes have some character to show, before I come to any decision."

I thought I could have helped papa to a decision at once in my case.

"There's much in that, much in that," quoth Mr. Lee, oracularly. "Well, you know, Marchmont, all I've got—and I'm sure I don't know how much it is—belongs to Mavis: but I don't want to tie it up, so that you can't make use of it, for you know how to make money: and I want to talk to you some day quietly, about the feasibility of an arrangement by which you shall have the use of the principal, with some sort of clause giving the bulk of it to either of the boys

that becomes a stockbroker, or dividing between them if both do. I want to do it soon; for I haven't made any will, and I may go off at a moment's notice."

"O, Uncle Arundel," cried Mamma, springing from her chair, "don't talk about money and death on a sweet summer day like this. Let me give you some more hock and a few grapes."

"You're as wild as a bird," he said, "and I believe the outlandish name poor Tom gave you means a thrush. This hock of yours, Marchmont, is better than any I can buy; and hock is the only wine my doctor will let me touch. Not a glass of port!" he added, plaintively.

"I'll send you over a few dozen to-morrow," said my father. "I have an immense lot, bought cheap when Riqueti the wine-merchant failed. It is Johannisberger of 1840."

"Thanks," said [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]. Then, in a whisper, "I shall see you in the City to-morrow."

We children all the while were romping on the cool grass, eating fruit, and having plenty of fun. I quite enjoyed being a child again, and found not the slightest difficulty in acting, and even thinking, like a child. Kitty loved me better than she loved Algy; being three years older than we, she assumed a right to tyrannize over us. I gave an amused submission, like Lord Derby's immortal navvie; but Algy rebelled, and used to cry, and tell the nurse that Kitty had been pulling his hair or pinching him. I began to fear there was a touch of meanness in Algernon's character.

Presently the conversation of our elders took another turn. Mr. Arundel Lee, enlivened perhaps by Johannisberger that no

man would shame by a supernaculum, was again laughing at Mamma's unusual name.

"Christian names have something to do with people's characters, or I should never have found you at Five Tree Hill, taking lessons in all sorts of absurd things from a half-cracked old baronet, who had lived alone with his books till he might have been bound in calf."

ME!

O great-uncle! How I should like to break out and say a word or two. To prevent accident, I filled my mouth with the very biggest strawberry I could find.

"He was the wisest man I ever knew," said my mother, simply.

ME!

I was glad I had half choked myself with that huge strawberry.

"He was an uncommonly good fellow, Mavis," said my father.

ME!

"He must have been a very remarkable man, from all we hear of his history," added Uncle Paul.

ME!

"Well," said Mr. Arundel Lee, laughing, "I did not mean to raise such a storm of indignation. I found him a perfect gentleman, certainly. But he was rather odd, you know, Mavis, and so I don't wonder you are rather odd sometimes."

Mamma laughed merrily. I thought the old gentleman rather rude in his attempts at humour. But wasn't I proud of Mamma's opinion of her tutor and son? Faith, I could hardly sleep that night!

Indeed, I did not sleep much, for various causes. I lay awake listening to the car-

riages crunching the gravel as the guests began to arrive. Then I speculated as to who were there, and what Mr. Arundel Lee would say, and how Mamma was dressed. Then I wondered what would happen if I walked downstairs in my night-shirt, and gave the assembled party a condensed narrative of my former existence.

After this I fell into a doze, and dreamt of Five Tree Hill, and was abruptly wakened by the noise of departing carriages. One or two o'clock, I conjectured. Very often, on sleepless nights, I would creep out of bed, and open my door quietly, and look at the clock in the hall below, which was always lighted. I did so now. It was just two.

I stood by the balustrade and looked down on the gay folk departing. As I stood I heard Uncle Paul's musical voice.

"You don't seem very well, Mr. Lee, so you must let me go home with you. I am a young man, you know; what time I go to bed is no consequence."

"You'll find it out when you're older," growled Mr. Lee.

"I wish you'd sleep here, uncle," said Mamma.

"No; I'm well enough. But this madcap may come if he likes, and I'll give him some refreshment at the end of the journey. Come along, sir! Good night, Mavis."

I crept back to bed, and this time slept soundly and dreamlessly.

When morning came, and a couple of maids entered the room to look after our baths and dressing, I noticed a scared expression on their faces, especially on that of Irish Nora, who had stuck faithfully to the family. As they manipulated us they talked

in whispers, and positively forgot to put soap into our eyes.

"Ah, poor old gentleman!" Nora said. "Wasn't it sudden? And Mr. Paul back here only an hour ago, dead tired with getting doctors and all. Well, he was a good old gentleman, and I wish he had been of the true Church, for he gave me a sovereign after I brought him the children to see, and I'd have spent it in masses for his soul: but it would be no use to waste it on a Protestant."

Something evidently had happened to Mr. Arundel Lee. The household was so upset that I did not see Mamma till the afternoon. Then she was crying too much than to tell us more than that her poor dear uncle was dead. When I made out the story it came to this: Uncle Paul had gone home with him because he looked a

little fagged. He slept all the way to Clapham. My uncle and the footman helped him into the hall; there he was obliged to sit down; in a few moments he became apoplectic, and was quite gone by the time a doctor could be brought to him.

So Mr. Arundel Lee died intestate after all; and, as my mother was his only direct relation, the immense property became my father's.

Algy and I had to sit in a funeral coach when Mr Lee was buried; and Algy cried with fright all the way. I did my best to console him, reflecting on the folly of sending young children to funerals.

Being a bad hand at dates, I cannot say how old we were at that time. An approximation may be obtained from the fact that till we were put into mourning we had never worn trousers. Algy's fright at the

funeral did not prevent his being very vain of his new habiliments—so vain that he made Dot laugh, though she grew solemn and sorrowful again on the instant, and rebuked him for his levity. As for me, I had too much enjoyed the airy linen of childhood to rejoice in black broadcloth.

CHAPTER III.

THE GOVERNESS.

Besides—though 'tis hardly worth while to put *that* in—
There are two little boys . . . but they only learn Latin.
JOHN PARRY.

ONE day my father took holiday. It was after one of his great dinners, and he had been rather tired. He could well afford to take holiday now, for Mr. Arundel Lee's large property had enabled him greatly to extend a business already enormous; so he was far less regular in the city than heretofore, leaving very much to his partners; and he talked of buying or building a

country house, and becoming a country gentleman. He had the look of one, in those pleasant eyes and with that stalwart form, far more than of a City man. My mother was eager that he should carry out this idea, for she tired of the heavy ceremonious dinners and the eternal interchange of visits. Mavis Lee, whose soul had been coloured by the pure atmosphere of Five Tree Hill, was not likely to enjoy life in a London suburb, all hurry and ostentation.

On this particular holiday, my father lay long in bed. He is by nature luxurious, as are many men whose energy when aroused is indefatigable. I remember we children were summoned to his room as he lay in royal indolence, forgetful of stocks and shares—a spacious lofty many-windowed room, with appliances fit for a prince. He had on a table by his bedside a cup of fra-

grant chocolate; the smell of that liquid (which I myself have never been able to drink) always recalls that morning. Scents act strongly on the memory. He talked much nonsense to us, as was his wont—and no man talked nonsense better in those pleasant days. Then he said to Mamma, who was sitting by a window in matutine dishabille, with a book in her hand (it was Bacon's Essays),

"Mavis, I'll breakfast under the plane tree to-day; the young uns can make it their dinner. Is Paul here?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "I wouldn't let him go to the Temple last night, though he pretended he had a lot of business to do."

"I am glad of that. By Jove, it's twelve o'clock! Run away, you kids, and I'll have my bath."

We ran away, and were soon in the

wildest part of the grounds. Kitty and Algy insisted on my telling them a story—they had found out that I either knew or could invent all manner of narrative absurdities, and they worried me perpetually into telling them tales. I found it an infinite bore. Luckily on this occasion the servants were in search of us before I could get beyond "*Once upon a time.*"

It was a jolly day this. My father, who, like most men of sanguine temperament, had a great gift of sleep, had washed away his fatigue in the hypnotic ocean. He was like a giant refreshed, and sat down to his breakfast with that giant appetite which is somehow infectious, and makes other people eat more than they intended. We youngsters had quite an unusual, and doubtless unhealthy, dinner; we had kidneys in champagne, and lobster mayonnaise, and dishes

hot with pepper, and dishes chilled with ice. I found that my palate took these things readily, whence I judged that the soul rather than the body must be the seat of taste. Observing Dot and Algy scientifically, it appeared to me that they ate greedily enough, but did not quite like it.

Pondering on this, I came to a second query: If the soul is the seat of taste, does it also control digestion? I felt sure that Dot and Algy would very soon have—well—stomach-aches; should I? I ate as much as I possibly could, to test this question fairly.

I also drank as much as I could, to test a third problem. My father, who was in his gayest humour, insisted (though Mamma protested) on giving us small glasses of champagne; and I think that, by adroit contrivance, I got twice as much as my brother and sister together.

The result of these experiments gave me great satisfaction, proving my theory to be right as to the power of the soul over the body. Dot and Algy both grew flushed and noisy and pert; they said saucy things to Mamma; they were childishly ebrious. Suddenly they subsided into feeling very poorly, and crying, and wanting to go to bed. They went, ignominiously. I remained, being in my usual state, and feeling that I could wind up with something devilled and a bottle of good claret.

"Ah!" methought, "when I grow up to the publishing age, and irrefragably prove to the world by this experiment that the soul is master of the body, what a stride metaphysics will make!"

It did not strike me, in my wisdom of childhood, that probably the world would altogether disbelieve my story.

"I told you not to be so foolish, Charlie," said Mamma, looking ready to cry. "Those children will be quite ill, poor dear little things!"

"Why, look at Rex!" said Papa, with a laugh. "I've been watching the grave little rogue. He's eaten more than Dot and Whiskers together, and there's nothing in the world the matter with him. Is there, Paul?"

"I think not," said my uncle. "I suppose he has a strong constitution, for the quantity he has eaten and drunk would have been quite enough to make me feel uncomfortable."

How I rejoiced in this spontaneous testimony to the truth of my theory! I don't think anybody of my age ever devoted himself so heartily to science!

"Cheer up, Mavis!" said Papa; "the

young monkeys will be right enough with a little saline medicine. But now, about what we were saying. It is time they were out of the hands of nursemaids. I don't believe even Kitty knows her alphabet—to say nothing of the catechism and the multiplication table. They ought to have a governess till we pack them off to school. What do you think, Mavis?"

"I suppose you are right, but I don't want a governess in the house; she would be so much in the way. Why, my dear Charlie, one of the chief subjects of conversation with the ladies who call here is their troubles with governesses. It seems to me that they are either very clever, and know too much by half, and expect to be equal and familiar with the mistress of the house—or otherwise they are desperately ignorant, and the very servants laugh at them. O, I dread a governess!"

"An intelligent nursery governess would do, I should think, to begin with. She would be quite free from those objections. What do you think, Paul?" said my father.

"I don't agree with either of you," Uncle Paul replied. "Observe what you want for these children. They require sound elementary training—not much instruction just now, but right instruction. Fancy a nursery governess having the remotest idea of how to teach arithmetic or geography or History! She would make the children learn tables and all the capes of Europe and all the kings of England—and they would get a vague notion that sixteen ounces multiplied by Cape Finisterre produced Henry VIII."

My father and mother laughed heartily. Uncle Paul went on:

"There is no reason, sister Mavis, why a governess should be at either one or the other extreme your lady visitors describe so

vividly. A lady, as governess, would be only too anxious not to intrude on your privacy, while she might be trusted to enforce respect from servants. These boys, you know, ought to get through the Latin accidence before they are sent to school, and the first book of Euclid would not hurt them, and they ought to get an accurate outline notion of the geography and history of England. That's enough to start them with; an intelligent gentlewoman would teach them that in a year, while Dot would be learning everything a young lady ought to know."

"Where shall we find your intelligent gentlewoman?" asked my father. "Though I fear, if you found her, Mavis would spoil her; she'd make too great a pet of such a paragon."

Uncle Paul paused, as if doubtful whether to proceed.

"I think I know the very person, if she would consent to come."

"Consent!" said my father.

"Yes; she is not looking for a situation, but I have told her she would be wise to take one. She is strangely placed. Her father, whom I first knew through a college friend, is Rector of Lytheby in Norfolk: he is, I think, the cleverest man I ever knew; he is, I am certain, the weakest. He was married in his youth to a superior woman, who took charge of him, kept him straight, suggested texts for his sermons and themes for his books, and made him a good reputation. He had a fair amount of private property; indeed the advowson of Lytheby is his own by inheritance. His only child by his first wife was a daughter, Annie—the girl I think may suit you. She learnt almost everything from her father and mother; I tell her she

is a regular Universal Dictionary; but she is not a bit spoilt or pedantic."

"How old is she?" asked mamma.

"Somewhere about five-and-twenty," replied Uncle Paul, "so far as I can judge. She isn't pretty, but she is very gentle and quiet. She reminds me of Shakespeare's Cordelia."

"One would think you were in love with her, Paul," said my father, who listened lazily while he smoked a cigar.

I was watching my uncle all the time he spoke, eating peaches the while. I never at any age disliked peaches. When mine uncle was talking, those dreamy eyes so brightened into stars, those mobile lips so changed with every word, that to watch him was for me an excitement. I could see an expression of intense pain cross his sensitive face as he heard Papa speak those words. But he went on, quietly:

"Not at all. I pity her heartily. Her father, tired possibly of being kept straight by a superior woman, in less than a year went crooked, and married a very inferior one. She was the daughter of his housekeeper, an impudent red-faced ignorant baggage of sixteen. She leads the poor weak Rector a dreadful life; he is infatuated with the hussy, and obeys her like a slave. She tried to treat Annie as if she were a servant. Annie, loth to leave her father, though she has enough from her mother to live very quietly, did all she could by way of keeping peace. But it was useless. One day this insolent wench, who is as strong as a horse, positively boxed poor gentle Annie's ears——"

"The wretch!" said my mother.

"Thereupon Annie came quietly away, being prevented from seeing her father, and

is now staying with a friend in London. I advise her, though she has about a hundred and fifty a year of her own, to find some occupation that will cause her to forget her feeling of loneliness."

"That parson must be an awful fool, Paul," said my father. "You have not told us his name."

"He is not a fool. He has one of the strongest clearest intellects I know. But he is devoid of will. Tell him a thing to be done, and he will do it better than anyone of whom I have experience."

"He is simply an intellectual machine," said Mamma. "He cannot have more soul than one of those calculating machines."

"I think you are right," laughed my uncle. "The Reverend Roger Keith—that's his name—is a machine. But Annie isn't; she's a true girl, with a fine intellect un-

usually well cultivated; and I should like to have that wretched wench put in the pillory that dared to assault her."

"Let her come here if she likes," said Mamma. "Charlie will settle about salary."

"By Jove!" exclaimed my father at this point, "that boy has eaten all the peaches. He'll be ill."

"No, I shan't, Papa," I said. "It's a waste of time."

"That young imp wants a governess," was the parental rejoinder.

The governess came in a few days, by which time my brother and sister had recovered from the effects of their gluttony. She was a quiet young lady, dressed in grey, with very thougthful eyes, and hair of a soft light brown. When I saw her meek and gentle expression, I longed to go into

Norfolk and inflict physical violence on the gross animal that had assaulted her. But, reflecting that I should suffer ignominious defeat at the hands of such a virago, I decided to leave it till I should grow bigger.

We were introduced to Miss Annie Keith in my mother's private room—not a boudoir at all, but a room of books, paintings, sketches with pen and pencil, ferns and fancies, follies and flowers. There they were drinking tea from dainty china, with accessory shreds of bread and butter. Such a contrast! Annie the essence of loving gentleness; Mamma the essence of loving power. I marvelled what would have happened to that audacious hoyden if she had attempted to assault my mother. There was a strong high spirit in Mavis Marchmont's bright eye and curved resolute mouth.

Kitty and Alice did not fancy Miss Keith for a governess as I did. Of course they had not heard her sad story: and could not have understood it if they had.

As to my mother, she fell in love with her at once.

CHAPTER IV.

FROM HOME TO SCHOOL.

"Maxima debetur reverentia pueris."

MISS ANNIE KEITH very soon became a favourite member of our household, combining gentleness with firmness and simplicity with knowledge in a manner most unusual. My complete allegiance she had from the first. She soon obtained the confidence of Dot and Algy, and managed their different tempers capitally. Dot was quick and bright, and sometimes saucy; Algy was slow and lazy, and

apt to be sulky. Miss Keith seemed to know some magic method of dealing with each temperament successfully.

Then she was of infinite service to my mother, saving her half the trouble of household management. She was one of those women who organize by instinct, and never fail to find a resource in any difficulty. The lonely and thoughtful maidenhood of Mavis Lee had not been at all a fit preparation for domestic economy on a large scale; everything of the kind bored her; and it was a wonderful relief to her mind, this having a lady on whom she could depend to direct the machinery of the establishment. Papa and Uncle Paul often laughed at her about it—reminding her of her dread of a governess, who must either be a fine lady, or sink to the servile level.

The relation between my father and uncle

was curious. My father, possessing to perfection the business intellect, would have made money in anything he attempted; at this moment he was looking forward with enthusiasm to the time when he should purchase an estate, and farm the land himself, and elevate the condition of the labourers, and prove to country gentlemen that a man may make his own land pay. As I have said, he took business as a boy takes cricket; he knew the game "all round;" he was the W. G. Grace of the Stock Exchange. My uncle, on the other hand, was student and thinker, pure and simple; he looked on business as a dreary toil for sordid ends. He studied the world around him, human and sub-human; studied character in society and the streets; knew the habits of all wild flowers and birds; yet had a higher vision—a dream of subtle

science, which was to solve the most difficult problem of life.

Notwithstanding this contrast of character, the brothers were the fastest of friends. My uncle was at the bar without practice, and had chambers in the Temple, and wrote in many ways with many signatures, pouring out the strong superfluity of an ever-active mind. His mind was no pool, but a fresh well-spring, always in overflow. But his London literature and his abstract studies did not prevent him from passing many hours daily at Marchmont Lodge, and it really seemed as if neither my father nor my mother could do without him. His chivalrous devotion to my mother was very pretty to see.

Years later I learnt that he had loved my mother. When my father became intimate with old Mr. Lee, he made up his mind pretty

quickly as to that gentleman's niece; and there is reason to believe that her mind also moved rapidly on that occasion. At any rate an engagement was soon made, to Mr. Arundel Lee's great delight; he had been in terror lest his niece should marry out of the Stock Exchange.

Soon after the engagement was actually made, Paul Marchmont came from Cambridge crowned with the highest scholastic honours. My father took him to Mr. Lee's, and he used to dine there pretty regularly in the days that preceded the marriage. But at last he struck.

"I'm not going over to Clapham to-morrow," he said to his brother.

"Why the devil not?" said Charlie Marchmont. "If you are not there to talk to prosy old Lee, I shall have to do it, and what will Mavis say?"

"I am not going," he repeated doggedly. "I'll never go there again until you're married."

My father opened his eyes in amazement. "What do you mean?"

Well, my dear Charlie, I'll tell you. Your Mavis is too beautiful, too charming in every way, for any man to see her and not love her. I am not the man, at any rate. If she were not yours, I should try to win her; but she is yours, so I shall run away from her too perilous beauty. Help me: say I am gone on a secret mission to San Francisco, or any other remote place. I will come back when you are married. When she is my sister, I shall take her hand with no tremulous feeling, and shall try to serve her in knightly fashion."

My father could hardly understand this feeling. He was a little puzzled.

"Do you really mean, Paul, that you are in love with Miss Lee?"

"No: emphatically no. I merely feel that I should be compelled to love her if I saw her very often. I merely feel that if she were engaged to any man but you, Charlie, I'd take her away from him, even if I had to kill him in doing it. I merely feel that I must go away somewhere and try to forget that perilous face, though it will haunt me all the time."

"You are an odd fellow, Paul," said my father. "Have your own way. But will you not have the same feeling when we are married?"

"O dear no," he answered quickly. "All will be changed! Mavis will be my sister. The mad fancy I have now will be extinguished, annihilated. You may trust me, Charlie."

"I trust you, Paul. Let it be as you say. I will invent some fiction that will satisfy Mavis; but, O dear me, what shall I do with old Lee after dinner?"

I heard most of this from my uncle in after-years, when he and I had become very fast friends. He placed the narrow sea between himself and his fair tormentor, and took refuge in the little island of Sark. Amid its wild scenery her unique face haunted him; he came suddenly back to Southampton, and buried himself in the ferny depths of the New Forest. Wandering one day near the Twelve Apostles, he met a gipsy—a man nearer seventy than sixty, though his hair was dark and his form erect and his limbs lisson. They got into talk—the gipsy asked to look at his palm.

"You have loved and lost," he said; "you will love and win."

My uncle could never quite understand the force of that prediction, though it was clear enough to me. He, lover of truth, of wisdom, of beauty, by means of that love won happiness.

Mamma was always thinking he ought to fall in love with Annie Keith. All women worth anything are match-makers; and Mamma was so delighted with Annie that she thought her fit bride for even a senior wrangler, though probably she did not quite know the meaning of that dignity. But neither my uncle nor Miss Keith was marriageably inclined; so Mamma's scheme failed.

I was very much amused with Miss Annie Keith as a governess. It was clear that I puzzled her. She had never seen such a boy. She taught capitally; and as she was teaching things which I knew a great

deal better than she did, I was a pretty fair judge. Kitty, being three years our senior, and just at the age when girls like learning and boys hate it, was quite proud of her superiority to us. We were to learn Latin—of course she decided to learn Latin too. It was pretty to see how she cantered through declensions and conjugations—it was painful to see Algy shirking his fences, and finding it imposible to believe that the Romans could have been such fools as to conjugate their verbs in four ways, when one would amply have sufficed. As for me, I tried to look as if I had never seen a Latin verb before, and made the most ludicrous mistakes, and did my best to maintain a character for that hatred of learning which is the healthy privilege of boyhood. Girls and men never have it, being inferior animals. I resisted more temptation in

this second childhood of mine than ever in my first avatar. I longed often to tell Dot and Whiskers, and even Miss Keith, what dreadful blunders they were making with their Latin and arithmetic. But I resisted, and blundered as much myself as possibly I could, and wondered how it was my blunders were not discovered.

I fear I astonished gentle Annie Keith. Having to suppress my actual self, I was often in extremes. Sometimes I was very clever—sometimes terribly stupid. She most certainly regarded me as a regular problem.

However, the months moved on, and we lived and laughed and learnt lessons together, and I managed to conceal my secret. But I began to think a man ought to be a most accomplished actor in order to play the child with anything like success.

My father, having made up his mind to turn country gentleman as soon as possible, was wont to look through the advertisements of the *Times* every morning in search of places to be sold. Well I remember a pleasant spring morning, when we were all at breakfast together—Miss Keith presiding over tea and coffee, as was the regular custom, Papa petting Kitty as he read his paper, Mamma lazily lounging in an easy-chair by the fire, and expecting Algy and me to bring to her little table what she wanted—when my father suddenly crumpled up his *Times*, and said,

"The very place! I shall go and see it to-day."

"A place in the country that you like, Charlie?" said Mamma. "How delicious!"

"Ah!" he said, standing up by the fire-place, "you want to go, I know. Well,

this seems the very place. It is Romayne Court, near Redborough, where old General Romayne used to live, who died a few months ago, nearly ninety. It seems, from what I hear, that he had only one son, who died before him: and the property is to be sold under some decree of the Court of Chancery. I know the place."

"So do I, by the Eternal!" was my instant thought; and I was carried back in memory to the choleric old gentleman who quarrelled with his artist-son! I hoped my father would buy the place. How close I should be to Five Tree Hill! My mother did not connect one place with the other, but she showed real delight at the idea of going into the country.

My Uncle Paul came in just then, with a gay smile on his somewhat sad face, and brought my mother a few rare flowers from

Covent Garden. He delighted in these little offerings, and my father had no touch of jealousy about them. He and Paul understood each other.

"Paul," he said, "come down to Redborough with me. I think Romayne Court is the very place to suit us. I want to look at it directly. Have you breakfasted?"

"Yes," said Uncle Paul, "on seltzer and brandy. Order your carriage while I eat two or three kidneys. Annie will give me a cup of tea."

One reason perchance of my father's wonderful success was, that he never let the grass grow under his feet. He drove straight to the agent to secure the refusal of Romayne Court, took train to Redborough and looked at the place, came back and signed an agreement to purchase, subject to

a conveyancer's approval of the title. The whole thing was a matter of hours. The result, which delighted us all, but delighted my mother and me above anything, was that in a few months we migrated from Wimbledon to Romayne Court. My mother was pleased with the thought of a quiet country life: I felt special satisfaction in being so near scenes which had been familiar for years. How had they changed? I longed to know. I felt sure there would be a chance of knowing soon.

We settled down. One morning said my sire, who was wont to propound his schemes at breakfast,

"These boys must go to school soon, Mavis. Miss Keith can manage Dot, but they ought to learn something. They are twelve."

Uncle Paul was staying with us.

"Send them to Grindley's," he said, turning from his omelet to look at his impetuous brother.

"Grindley's?"

"Yes. Best school in the county. Best private school in the world. Old Cato Grindley's dead; but his nephew, Cicero Grindley, who was with me at Cambridge, keeps the school up well. Just the place for these youngsters—three miles off, you can see it from the window—so they could come home for any Sunday or holiday."

"What do you think, Mavis?" asked my father.

"If they must go," said Mamma, "and I suppose they must, I should certainly prefer their going to a school Paul knows all about, and that I can see from my windows. I can drive the ponies over whenever I like. But you know," she continued, shaking her rosy

forefinger at Papa, "I shall not decide until I have seen Mrs. Grindley."

"Quite right," said my father. "The mistress of a household is its soul."

CHAPTER V.

BIRCHANGER PARK.

O the gay school life! The impartial Commonwealth!
Homage to finest classic, finest cricketer:
Homage to master of the sculls or algebra.
Who would not gladly be a reckless boy again?
School is a kingdom where no sneak we tolerate:
School is a country where to lie is kickable:
A rare oasis in that desert, memory.

The Comedy of Dreams.

THE year before we left London had been a time of unusual bustle and excitement, for the Hyde Park Exhibition—first in a series of immense imbecilities—was plaguing the world of London, and my father's set were, of course, just the people

to make much of an event like this. There was a perpetual whirl. One glance at the big glass house was enough for me; I thought it as much like architecture as Mr. Thackeray's ode in the *Times*, which he had forgiven for its "thunder and small beer," was like poetry. Mamma was of like opinion, and positively declined to pay perpetual visits to the place; so, as Kitty and Algy liked it excessively, and screamed with delight whenever they were allowed to go there, it came to their going very often with Miss Keith, while I stayed quietly at home with my mother. Then she would tell me the story of her youth, little knowing to whom she was telling it. Then she would describe Ford Cottage and Beau Sejour and St. Apollonia's Chapel, and Sir Edward Ellesmere. Then she would teach me what years ago I had

taught her . . . pure poetry, and old romance, and subtle whims of the intellect. It was delightful to receive, filtered through Mavis's mind, the ideas which she had first learnt from me. How delighted she was with my swift apprehension! Verily it was extremely pleasant for both mother and son; since there was, for manifest reasons, perfect accord between the two minds. She taught me what I knew full well before; but it assumed a deeper meaning after it had been crystallized in her intellectual atmosphere.

My mother and I had become such very great friends during the Exhibition year, that she was quite loth to part with me when the time came for our going to school. I looked forward to it. I wanted to be a schoolboy again. Algy, I remember, cried; Kitty laughed at him for crying; Mamma scolded her, and said she should be whipt

if she was so hard-hearted. As for me, I quite enjoyed the idea, and looked forward with delight to a renewal of my acquaintance with *Pons asinorum* and *Propria quae maribus*, and had delicious visions of cricket and football, rowing and swimming.

The waggonette was at the door. My father had taken to driving four in hand. Algy and I were inside with our trunks: Uncle Paul sat on the box: off we started gaily towards Birchanger Park. It was a pleasant drive, and a pleasant scene when we got there. The old-fashioned red brick house stands in a southern hollow of the hills, and above it the hanger (or hanging wood), chiefly of birch-trees, which gives it its name. As I beheld the great mass of silver-rinded thin-sprayed trees, I thought of Coleridge's lines:

> "Beneath a weeping birch, most beautiful
> Of forest trees, the lady of the woods."

My father drove up to the front in grand style, a groom blowing a horn to announce our approach. I suppose few people made so magnificent a first appearance.

Dr. Cicero Grindley was a very different man from my old acquaintance, Dr. Cæsar Grindley, his uncle. He was a man of about thirty, six feet two or three in height, light-haired, keen-eyed, with a classical Greek face, and with the most marvellous flow of language most musically uttered. His Ciceronian baptism was prophetic. When I had been his pupil a very short time, I discovered that although he was a sufficiently stern disciplinarian after the antique fashion, yet far more than the flogging-block did everybody dread the sharp sarcasms with which he punished dunces and mutineers. His courtesy to my father and uncle was more like that of a prince receiving illustri-

ous visitors, than of a schoolmaster taking two small boys as pupils. It was superb without being absurd. I thought I perceived an amused expression in Uncle Paul's countenance. However, the reception was a pleasant one, and my father went away quite satisfied with the establishment. I need not say that my mother had previously made Mrs. Grindley's acquaintance, and been quite taken by her. This indeed nobody could help. She was simply the most fascinating woman I ever saw.

Algy and I had two introductions to pass—one to the school indoors, the other to the school out of doors. I looked forward to both with much amusement. Poor Algy was in an awful funk, of course; but I, who had known Eton in my earlier youth, did not much fear the smaller world on which I was about to enter.

Dr. Cicero Grindley handed us over to an examiner—a seedy man named Glanville, whose duty it was to find out what we knew, and place us accordingly. Poor Algernon could not remember anything Miss Keith had taught him. This seedy Glanville, taking snuff all the time, tried us in Euclid, arithmetic, and the Eton Latin Grammar. There was a black board in the room, and lots of lumps of chalk lay round it, as if it were the habit of black boards to lay misshapen white eggs.

"Now, young gentlemen," says Glanville, taking snuff, "prove that the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal."

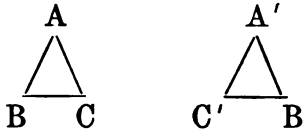
He motioned Algy to try first. The unfortunate youngster tried, and produced a network of nonsense that was almost laughable.

"Rub that out," says Glanville, in a

voice of thunder. "Now, sir," to me, "you try—but I suppose one is as great a fool as the other."

Now I had intended to appear quite as great a fool as Algy, that we might remain in the same form; but this snuffy man's insolence annoyed me. So I worked the immortal *pons asinorum* out in the very words of Euclid, evidently to Glanville's amazement; and then I said:

"Euclid's demonstration is unnecessarily complex. Allow me to try another.



Let the isosceles triangle A B C be laid on its opposite side, as in A′C′B′. Then there are two triangles having their sides A B, A C, equal to A′C′, A′B′, and the angle B A C equal to C′ A′ B′. Therefore

the remaining angles are equal, each to each; therefore A B C is equal to A′ C′ B′, which is the same as A C B."

I thought that snuffy tutor's hair would stand on end with astonishment as I thus demonstrated. He paused awhile, and then passed on to arithmetic, requesting Algy, who was supposed to understand fractions, to do an addition sum therein:

$$\frac{2}{3} + \frac{5}{6} + \frac{9}{10} + \frac{14}{15}$$

Algy, poor dear boy, made his L.C.M. 120, and then blundered away till he got as a result $5\frac{2}{17}$.

"That boy's an idiot!" growled Grindley, and took snuff. "You try it, sir."

I took a bit of chalk and wrote on the board:

$$n = 4$$

$$\frac{n\,(n+1)}{n+2} = 3\tfrac{1}{3}$$

I don't think I ever saw a man quite so astonished as Grindley, though I have had unusual opportunities of astonishing people. It took him some time to attack us again.

"Young gentleman," to Algernon, "conjugate *malo*."

This Algy did, with slight misadventure.

"As to you, sir," he said, "I suppose you can write elegiacs?"

"Modern writers of the Latin elegiac," I said—"Lord Wellesley not excepted—do not attain perfection because they have not the true theory of scansion. The pentameter consists of two dactyls, one spondee, and two anapaests."

"The devil!" said Glanville, and took snuff furiously.

At this moment entered Dr. Cicero Grindley, and inquired if the examination was over. We were dismissed. What

occurred between him and the snuff-taker I cannot say; but I found myself placed in the fourth form, while Algy was in the first.

My brother and I, being dismissed, strolled into the playing fields; cricket was on in half-a-dozen places, and I determined to be soon among the players. Both of us had a complete cricketing outfit, and we had pocket money enough to subscribe to the innumerable small extravagances of an aristocratic school. However, we must fall into our places first. We walked down under splendid elms, and I heartily enjoyed the scene, and the thought of [illegible] again: but Algy [illegible]

"I shall never [illegible] never. I must go [illegible]

"Nonsense! [illegible] jolly enough.

"I [illegible]

"You don't seem to care about anything."

We came suddenly round an angle of the hedge, where about half-a-dozen boys had made a fire, and were doing some rough cookery—against rules of course. Schoolboys who do this sort of thing in a corner, instead of coming to the front in some good game, are usually dolts or cads or louts. These seemed no exception. The biggest among them—big he seemed to me, being probably three years my senior—cried out,

"Hullo, new fellows! What the devil do you mean by coming here? This is private."

He had sprung to his feet, and, as Algy was running away, he gave him a blow in the back, which knocked him over. Then he rushed at me.

I had long since discovered that I could manage my new body quite as well as my

old one. I had forgotten none of the athletic science which schoolboys and soldiers necessarily learn. As this fellow came at me like a cow, I gave him one under the chin with my right that dislocated every bone in his brainless skull. He fell flat on the grass. I picked up Algy, who was more frightened than hurt, and we wandered farther afield.

Our next meeting was more pleasant. It was well on in the afternoon, and the Sixth Eleven had drawn their stumps. As we passed their tent we met two young fellows of seventeen or eighteen—one in ordinary dress, the other in flannels. They might have been Apollo and Hercules in their boyhood. One was tall, slight, agile; the other of middle height and noble breadth for a boy. One was Captain of the School; the other Captain of the Eleven. Their

names were Giffard and Wintle. They came along, arm in arm, talking over the day's practice. Giffard noticed us at once.

"New fellows, eh? When did you turn up?"

"A couple of hours ago," I said.

"Seen Glanville?" asked Giffard.

"Yes," I replied, "and thought him a fool."

"That young cock crows early," said the weighty Wintle.

"He's right about Glanville though," says the Captain of the school. "You two fellows look like twins."

"We are," said Algy, whom I had been trying to make talk by all conceivable methods.

"So I thought. Come along with us. I didn't know you were coming, or I'd have found you out before. It's hard lines for

youngsters like you coming to a big school."

"Yes," I said, "I've had to thrash one fellow already."

"By Jove," said Wintle, standing still and putting his strong hands on my shoulders, "you're a precocious youngster! Now, whom did you thrash?"

"Well," I replied, "I didn't ask his name before knocking him down, and if I had asked afterwards he could not have told me. I only know he was a cowardly blackguard. He struck my brother Algernon without the slightest provocation, so I hit him pretty hard in return. He was doing some cookery over a fire by the hedge yonder."

"That cad Price," said Giffard. "He's always playing the bully. We'll have him up for this, Wintle."

Dr. Grindley, as I came in time to learn, gave a certain power of punishment to his

sixth form. He made them responsible for general order in the school. On the present occasion "bully Price," as he was commonly called, was summoned before the sixth; and, his conduct to Algy having been proved, he received a dozen strokes with an ash sapling. During the whole time I was at Birchanger Park that fellow never exchanged another word with me.

Placed in the fourth form, I tried to be as slow as possible.

It was hard work. I could not always help giving replies that were too clever; and in fact I found myself in the fifth form before I had been a month at the school. The master of that form, Charles Marshall, a wonderful Greek scholar, had got his boys into the *Birds* of Aristophanes. Verily (unless some one had burnt or otherwise misused it) there was a verse translation of the

Birds, my latest amusement, mouldering in the Bookroom at Beau Sejour. I really could not resist the temptation. I drew on my memory, and sent up occasional passages in verse. Marshall was astonished.

"Marchmont major," he said, "you have an instinctive apprehension of the Greek comedy, and a remarkable mastery of English verse for one so young."

So I was the hero of the hour in the fifth form... and found myself before the end of the term promoted to the sixth. It was a wonder. No boy in his thirteenth year had ever before reached that Olympian level. Of course I knew it was quite unfair; but what was I to do? And after all, I did no particular harm to anybody.

News came of Wellington's death. The boys all felt it; the great pure stainless name of England's steadfast chieftain was known to

even the youngest. For me, I went away into a lonely corner of the playing fields, and wept. I had known him. I had met that bright commanding penetrative eye which had power to search into the character of an officer, into the contrivances of an enemy. He was, I think, the greatest captain the world has seen. Tennyson's Ode was intensely inferior to its theme; but I wholly agree with the saying,

> " . . . . . for one so true
> There must be other nobler work to do
> Than when he fought at Waterloo."

A month more—Christmas at Romayne Court. Giffard and Wintle both lived within a dozen miles of us, and both engaged to come on Christmas Eve to spend a week at my father's house. This arrangement was made when the final examination took place, and everybody's parents put in

an appearance. Dr. Cicero was quite proud of me, and would have flattered me into life-long vanity and conceit, had I been honestly the *niger cygnus* that he imagined: but knowing myself a mere imposter, I took the thing easily. What annoyed me most was poor dear Algy's chagrin. I had coached him a good deal, and managed to get him into the second form; but there he obstinately stuck.

There was deep snow on the ground as we started from Birchanger Park in the waggonette. As a reward for my brilliant doings, I sat on the box beside my father, and criticized his style of driving. Nobody can drive brilliantly through snow; but I was irreverent enough to think that my father's left hand was hardly sensitive enough for the work he had to do. However, we got home with no particular mishap; and I

was quite prepared to take the reins if my father had broken down.

All that Christmas we had snow, and a mighty wood fire burnt in every room of Romayne Court. During the first week, Uncle Paul, who was evidently puzzled by the difference between Algy's school achievements and mine, set upon me fiercely with mathematical and classical questions. I determined to give him tit-for-tat—for why should he spoil my holiday?—so I asked him to explain passages that have maddened all the commentators, and to solve insoluble perplexities in Probability, and to demonstrate Euclid's twelfth axiom. He gave me up at last; but kindly offered to teach me chess. I beat him the first game.

"I can't make out those two boys of yours," he said to Mamma that evening. "Rex is almost too quick, and poor dear Algy is certainly too slow."

"Rex isn't a bit too quick, Paul," said my mother. "He's a genius, that's all."

"Ah," said Uncle Paul. "I wonder if it is so? I hope it is so."

I, who happened to overhear this bit of dialogue, wondered whether what we call genius; was usually based on the consciousness of an earlier life. Did Shakespeare, did Milton, did Coleridge, remember the life they led on earth before? The start of a whole lifetime ought to enable the human racer to "spreadeagle his horses."

Wintle and Giffard turned up in good time on Christmas Eve. We were a very full house . . . lots of girls, many of them mere schoolgirls, fit for schoolboy flirtation. My father had invited hosts of people, and I really had very little chance of talking to Mamma. Kitty, who was growing up only too fast, was quite the prettiest little girl in

the place. Giffard and Wintle both fell in love with her of course, and both confided their passionate secret to my inexperienced ear. It was great fun.

There is a lake at Romayne Court, and it was thoroughly frozen, and my father telegraphed to London in his grand way, for innumerable skates of all sizes and patterns. They came; the ice was swept, and down we went; I had never skated in this life, but I buckled on a pair, all steel and thin almost as knife blades, and persuaded Mamma to sit in a chair, and drove her over the lake at no end of a pace. Giffard was the best skater among us; Wintle had never tried it, but he went on resolutely, and broke many holes in the ice, and eventually succeeded in keeping erect for almost two minutes.

Sometimes I used to get a quiet half hour

with Mamma of an evening, when everybody else had dispersed—the young folk in bed, Papa in the billiard or smoking-room.

"Your friends are nice fellows," she said to me that evening as I knelt by her sofa. "Different in style, but good boys I am sure. I can't understand how it is you are in the same class with them, and Algy so far below. I am very proud of you, Rex."

I felt a deceitful rascal.

"There is nothing to be proud of, Mamma," I said; "I am rather clever in two or three things, that's all. Algy will do very well by and by, and I will do the best I can for him always."

"I don't think Dot is half as fond of learning as I was at her age," Mamma said musingly. "Ah, but she has not such a teacher; dear Annie teaches well, but I

learnt from a man who taught me because he loved me. I am his spiritual daughter, Rex: do you know what I mean?"

"I think I do," was my answer, kissing her lovely hand.

What a confounded hypocrite and impostor I am!

"Ah," she said, "I often feel as if he were close to me, as if he spoke to me, as if he whispered, '*I will teach you still.*' And it is strange, Regy dear, I almost always have that feeling when you are with me. There is something about you that is like him, I suppose. O, my darling, grow up as good, as gentle, as kind, as brave."

As my beautiful Mavis said this, she took my boyish head into her loving arms, and pressed me to her bosom. I wished I could tell her the miraculous truth. I was silent.

Holidays came to an end, and their end is

usually miserable. The end of this Christmas vacation was miserable enough, for there set in a muggy drizzly dirty thaw, and the whole world was dipt in soap and water. It was a most uncomfortable ending to what had been a very jolly time. Then Algy caught a cold at the last moment, so we were kept back, and we were two days later at Birchanger Park. Now it was Dr. Grindley's rule, whereof I was unaware, to flog all boys who came behind time, so Algy and I had to be flagellated; and Granville, who was the customary operator on these occasions, had a fiendish joy in pitching into me. He wouldn't, if he had known that the birch twigs impinging on the outside gave me real delight, as proving that I actually was a boy again. It was my first flogging at Birchanger Park; I fear it was poor Algy's fiftieth, or thereabouts.

CHAPTER VI.

SWEET AND TWENTY.

"In delay there lies no plenty;
Then come kiss me, Sweet and Twenty!"

AT seventeen I was Captain of the School and of the Eleven. Giffard was at the Bar, with brilliant prospects. Wintle was junior partner in the firm of Wintle & Co., Russian merchants, Birchin Lane. Kitty was a flirt. Algy was in the fifth form. Just then arose for me a difficult situation. An anonymous letter reached me at Birchanger Park; it was brief enough:

"*Take care of your silly sister.*"

The handwriting, cramped and quaint,

was entirely unlike any that I knew. Was it a friendly warning, or a scoundrel insult? The epithet applied to Kitty rendered the latter more likely. However, I determined to act in the matter.

Dr. Cicero Grindley wisely gave his sixth form plenty of freedom. His theory was that when a boy reached the upper level of the school his manliness and self-control should have a chance of development. I had kept a horse at Birchanger Park ever since I entered the Sixth, and used to ride over to Romayne Court whenever I had a fancy. There was only an hour's work with the Doctor on the day when I received this laconic letter; the notice paper on the class-room door contained only two items.

"*Sixth Form.*

XI . . XII. Dr. Grindley. Probability.
II . . III. Herr Grutschk. Faust."

The worthy German's prælections I had invariably shirked; but I never shirked the Doctor, specially when he took up a topic so dear to him as that Land Debateable between mathematic and metaphysic. He was most lucid and logical this morning on the method of least squares, a perfect demonstration of which I have never seen in print.

When the lesson was over, I went up to the Doctor and told him I was going over to Romayne Court, and might possibly want to stay the night.

"By all means, Marchmont," he said. "Take your time. I am accustomed to trust you."

"Thank you, sir," I said, and had my horse saddled, and was at Romayne Court in twenty minutes. When I had sent my horse round to the stable, I strolled up through the grounds. The house was full,

evidently. Gay groups were on the lawns and terraces, and there were white sails on the lake, and an effervescent mixture of gay music and light laughter floated in the air. I wondered what it meant.

Instead of going straight to the house, I strolled through the grounds, and looked curiously at the various groups of gaily-dressed people who passed to and fro between shade and sunlight, and marvelled what had induced my father to have this superb entertainment, and why Algy and I had heard nothing about it. At last, after loitering through the grounds without meeting anyone I knew, I sat down in an arbour dark with yew, where an alley of that slow-growing evergreen crossed the garden. In this shade there were many loungers, and I caught some of their talk.

"So Marchmont really expects to get in

for the county," said one harsh unpleasant voice. "He might as well try to reach the moon. We must have a gentleman for the county."

"Never mind," said a voice more musical. "So long as he gives us pleasant days like these he is a public benefactor, and he should have my vote if it were possible for me to have a vote."

They passed on, these quidnuncs. The next I heard were voices of ladies, silver-sweet.

"Do you think Kitty Marchmont pretty?" says one.

"Pretty?—yes; but she has no style—decidedly *gauche*. What the Duke can see in her, I am unable to imagine. A man of his experience ought to have some taste."

"Ravenstower is in his dotage," said the other. "He would fall in love with any doll."

"Will he marry Miss Marchmont?"

"My dear! Don't you know he is married already. He married Lydia Walsh, the actress, and she is the real Duchess of Ravenstower; but she despises him too much to take his title. She won't even receive an allowance from him. I believe the little Marchmont girl really thinks he is in earnest, and she will be a Duchess; but he daren't marry, and he certainly wouldn't marry her if he could."

These voices passed also away, leaving me fierce enough in yew arbour. It seemed that people were trying to make fools of both my father and my sister. The Duke of Ravenstower, a haughty though impoverished noble, was Lord Lieutenant of the county; he drank my father's wine, borrowed my father's money, cast ogreish oligarchic eyes at my pretty sister. An adroit and elegant old

man—white-haired, but perfumed—a skeleton, padded—with time's losses repaired by the best artists—with a courteous manner and a hugely mortgaged rent-roll—above all, a Duke. Little Dot was tempted. She imagined herself a Duchess already. It was his notion to get my father to contest the county: he hoped, while he was busy at this political work, to come to terms with Kitty.

I walked out from my yew-tree bower, full of boyish wrath. I crossed the lawn, and ascended terrace after terrace. Presently I saw on the higher terrace a group, easily recognisable. There were my father and mother; there was Kitty, wonderfully like what my mother was in her youth, but more petulant and less intelligent: there was a tall old gentleman walking with my sister, and talking with the affected vivacity of an imagined youth: there was my Uncle Paul,

strolling behind, with a look of listless vexation. He was lagging a few yards behind. I walked briskly up and joined him.

"Ah, Rex," he said, "what brings you here? Holiday-keeping?"

"No," I replied. "I rode over to see how you all are. This is quite a festival. Does my father want to get into Parliament?"

He looked keenly at me.

"Yes, he does. I wonder at so absurd an ambition; but he has made up his mind that it is a good thing to do."

"If I were of age, I'd come forward and oppose him," I said. "It would be great fun. But what the deuce does his Grace the Duke of Ravenstower want here?"

"He wants to marry Kitty, so far as I understand," said Uncle Paul.

"He is married already," I replied. "He

only wants to borrow money from Papa, and to make Dot his mistress, if he gets a chance. I am glad I came over to-day."

The light in my eye, my firm lip, my clenched fist, told my uncle that I was in thorough earnest.

"What do you mean to do, Rex?" he asked.

"I'm going to the little book-room," I said. "Will you try and send Kitty there, on some pretext or other, within half an hour?"

"I will," he replied.

I slipped away, unseen by my father and mother, and took refuge in the little book-room, which was crammed from floor to ceiling with books that can be read. I took up *Martinus Scriblerus*, and lay back in a lounging chair and waited. Presently Kitty entered, looking for a book, apparently.

"Dot," I said.

She threw up her pretty head with an air of contemptuous defiance. Ah, Mavis, her mother, could not have done that. Mavis was and is too true a lady. Kitty had all the future Duchess in her, as she looked at me.

"What do you want, you troublesome boy?" she asked.

"Are you going to be Duchess of Ravenstower?" I inquired.

"What business is that of yours? His Grace is very pleasant and nice—I like his society. I suppose I may talk to him without harm?"

"O dear yes, Dot. If that is all, I beg your pardon. But is it all? Has not his Grace said something about marriage?"

Kitty began to whimper.

"He said something the other day that I

198183

am afraid meant what is very wicked. I am afraid of him, Rex, I am, indeed. He is very polite and pleasant and witty, but I am tired of him: only he pleases Papa so much, and I don't want to disoblige Papa."

It flashed through my mind at that moment, how very narrow is the sphere of common sense! My father is a perfect man of business, but he would willingly have thrown his pretty daughter into the arms of a pauper Duke old enough to be her grandfather! As if to be a happy wife were not better than to be an unhappy Duchess!

"Dot, my darling," I said, putting my arm round her, "you must have nothing to do with that fellow. He is already married."

I felt her start.

"Yes, it is quite true! He is a scoun-

drel, Duke or no Duke! Now, I will tell you what to do. I want to talk to him; get him to walk with you through the rooms, and bring him to the Armoury: then slip quietly away. Will you?"

"I will." And away she went to do it.

The Armoury had been fitted up by dear old General Romayne, and contained specimens of all kinds of weapons. There was the Lion Heart poleaxe; there was the Roman pilum; there was the rapier of Toledo; there was the shillelagh of Ireland. I took from the walls a pretty pair of rapiers, steel that you could double without breaking, and waited for the Duke.

In time he came, entering the door first, and Kitty slipped away as I had directed. He did not at first notice her disappearance, nor did he notice me. He was looking at the trophies with which the walls were

covered. Suddenly he turned to speak to Kitty, and was evidently surprised at her disappearance. Turning round, he caught my eye fixed on him. Now came my time.

"You are a scoundrel, Duke of Ravenstower," I said.

A fiery flush came into this haughty noble's face. Men seldom spoke to him as to an equal. To hear such words from a boy amazed him.

"Who are you, you impudent fellow?" he said.

"I am Reginald Marchmont, brother of the lady whom you, a married man, have insulted by your addresses."

"Pshaw!" he cried, in a fury, "you are a miserable schoolboy. I will have you sent back to school and well flogged, you little fool!"

"Little" was rather an insult, as I stood

six foot one in my stockings at that time.

"You may have your choice of these rapiers, Duke," I said. "You will fight me before you leave this room. If you refuse, I will horsewhip you in public. I suppose, being by courtesy a gentleman, you know how to use a sword?"

He came forward, white with rage, took up a rapier, and placed himself in position. I saw he could fence; but in three things I was his superior—length of arm, strength of wrist, youthful keenness of eye. Twice I disarmed him; the third time I ran my blade through the fleshy part of his sword-arm. He went off to be tended by his valets, having promised me on his honour never again to speak to my sister.

Next I found my way to my mother's boudoir. She was very tired; dissipation always wearied her. She was dissatisfied

with my father's political ambition, and with Kitty's fancy for her Duke. She had hoped for quiet when she came into the country, and for that exquisite untrammelled life which is only possible amid the peaceable solitudes of nature. That my father should take a fancy to become member for the county—that a Duke should make love to Dot—were things of which she had not dreamt. They destroyed her delight. I consoled her as best I could, saying no word of my duel with the Duke. After a time I went down again into the gardens.

There was a buzz of gossip on lawn and terrace. The Duke had ordered out his equipage, and gone off to Ravenstower without saying a word to Mr. Marchmont. This was the story. What could it mean? Had he been rejected by Miss Marchmont,

to whom everyone saw he paid so much attention? A hundred questions were asked and were unanswered. There was a whirl of rumours in the social atmosphere.

Crossing the terrace, I found myself close by my father and Uncle Paul, who were as much puzzled as anybody by the Duke's sudden disappearance. I went up to them.

"You here, Rex," said my father; "why, I thought you were hard at work at your Latin and Greek at Birchanger."

"I only came over for a few hours to punish a scoundrel, sir," I said.

"What do you mean?" asked my father.

"Well, sir, I hope you won't think it very impertinent; but I have just fought that fellow Ravenstower, who had the audacity to make love to Kitty, though he is a married man. He is gone off, I believe; I ran him through the arm. It will take

him a week or two to get well again."

My father looked perfectly amazed. It took him some time to become articulate. Then he said:

"You mean to say you fought a duel with the Duke of Ravenstower?"

"Yes, and if he were not so old I should have horsewhipped him. He is simply a scoundrel!"

"But how came he to condescend to fight a schoolboy like you?" said my father.

"*Condescend!*" I exclaimed, indignantly. "I think mine was the condescension, to cross swords with such a fellow! It took him some time to condescend, but when he saw that if he would not fight he would be well thrashed, he pulled together his small remains of courage."

At that moment I saw Dot in the distance, and went off to talk to her, leaving

my father to discuss my oddities with the ever-sympathizing Uncle Paul.

"Well, Rex?" says Kitty, interrogatively.

"Well, Dot," I reply, tranquilly, "what have you got to say? Are you pining for your elderly admirer?"

"I hate him!" she answered. "I only spoke to him because Papa seemed to wish me to receive him with some courtesy. But I think he is ugly, even for a Duke—and I am sure he is stupid; and I hope—I do hope I shall never see him again."

"You never will, Kitty," replied I, "so don't trouble yourself."

"Are you quite sure I never shall?" she asked.

"Quite, child. I have given the fellow a lesson. He won't trouble you more."

"What a boy you are!" said Kitty. "You don't mean to say you have said anything to the Duke of Ravenstower?"

"I don't mean to say anything about it," I replied. "He has left Romayne Court, and will not trouble you any more. Find somebody else to flirt with, that's a good girl."

Kitty was indignant, whereat I did not wonder: Girl Twenty can hardly be expected without indignation to take advice from Boy Seventeen. The relation between brother and sister is very useful, and therefore, like all useful things, very beautiful. A sister may teach a brother many valuable lessons in the fashion and fantasy of life; a brother may teach his sister what it is that men adore in women. What is it? Caprice? Beauty? Wit? Grace? Temper? No: these are all in perfection delicious; but what a man adores in a woman is that ideal innocence, that sweet chastity of spirit, which he knows for himself unattainable. And, if

happy enough to achieve the marriage of completion, he knows that one-half of him is pure. The dearer half of him lives in the realm of light. He must perforce grope in the twilight of the world sometimes, but she need never forsake that calm abode of clarity in which she was predestined to dwell.

That Dot had been intoxicated by the foolish fancy of becoming a Duchess is quite clear, but my straightforward statements on the subject had some of the power of Ithuriel's spear: and she beheld Ravenstower in his proper shape, a battered old *roué*, without an ounce of honour or conscience. She was rather shamefaced about it, and lost for the time a little of her vivacity; but the people staying at Romayne Court all imagined that she had refused the Duke, and so she had rather a social triumph.

That evening, as I next day learnt from my uncle Paul, he and my father had a long and serious colloquy on the general situation. Everybody had gone to bed except a few loiterers in the billiard and smoking-rooms. I was one of the latter: of course it was a point of honour to smoke at Birchanger, since it was rigidly prohibited. My father seemed perfectly amazed at the promptitude of my action with regard to the Duke.

"The boy was right, Paul, and I was wrong. I had no notion he was so full of fire. He ought to do well."

"He won't do on the Stock Exchange," said Uncle Paul. "What shall you make of him? He ought to go to College."

"I must think about it. One thing is certain: I may as well give up standing for the county, after this row with old Ravens-

tower. I can't succeed without his help."

"You would not have succeeded with it. The sitting members have more real influence in the county than the Duke, who is so pressed for money that he lets his farms at a rack rent. I am glad you will give up the idea: you can do much more good as a county gentleman than as a member of the House. Mavis, I know, will be delighted."

"By Jove," quoth my father, in his usual rapid way, "I'll go and tell her at once. She won't be asleep yet. Good night, brother Paul."

Off he went, and uncle Paul strolled into the smoking-room, where he found me, and seemed a little surprised. There were some odd people here to-night, two of whom I specially remember. One was an American gentleman, Colonel Cæsar Goff, who drank so much whiskey and smoked so many cigars

that I was quite appalled. His skin was the colour of old parchment; his nose was hooked like a vulture's; his voice was a vulture's scream. The other oddity was a slim young man, who wore gold spectacles, and who was called Professor Wrightson. What he professed I don't know, but he talked omniscience. He lisped a little and stuttered a little, which did not prevent his chattering faster than anybody I have ever met. Between him and the Colonel I was pretty well stunned. A Niagara of words poured into each ear. While on the right the Colonel was eloquently narrating his exploits in the wild regions of America, on the left the Professor was talking politics, theology, chemistry, finance, and comparative anatomy, all in a breath.

"You see, sir," said Colonel Goff, "when that bar (he meant bear) saw me coming

with my rifle, she ran off lumbering to protect her cubs . . ."

"But that locomotive engines will be driven by the heat produced when potassium takes fire on the surface of water, is, I think . . ."

This was the Professor.

"And the old he-bear came down from the hill on me with tremendous precipitation. I thought my life was lost; however, I had a revolver . . ."

"A new method of destroying armies is a want much felt, and I think I have found a chemical agent by which fifty thousand men can be destroyed ten miles off at a cost of . . ."

"My revolver burst! Imagine my horror! The old bear . . ."

"I mean to offer my invention to the War Secretary, who . . ."

I smoked tranquilly, mixing the sayings of my two neighbours in rather a complex way. It did not matter: the fictions of a bragging hunter did not mingle badly with the fictions of a blundering scientist. When uncle Paul entered, sitting down apart from the general crowd, I was not sorry to join him. He lighted a cigar.

"When are you going back to Birchanger, Rex?" he asked.

"To-morrow afternoon, I think, sir. To-morrow is an off day. I can stay as late as I like."

"Your father is rather astonished at your fighting propensities. I think he wants to talk to you after breakfast about your future career. Do you feel disposed to become a stockbroker?"

"Certainly not. That will suit Algernon perfectly. He was born to be a stockbroker."

"That is fortunate; you, I suppose, would like to go to College and complete your education, before absolutely deciding what you will do."

Now I had thought this matter over, and, while I had some hankering after the indolent quietude of cloister and quadrangle, I felt that it would be a dreadful bore to go over ground again that I knew perfectly well. Pretending to learn what I knew already had been good fun at school, but I had had quite enough of it. The active and originative tendencies were strong in me. I said:

"No, uncle, I think not; I know as much as I want to know. I should prefer to travel through England a little before deciding."

"Through England? Not abroad?"

"Not at present: I want to see England

and the English people. It appears to me that there is more to be learnt in this way than universities can teach me. I am quite willing to work hard when the time comes, but I should like a year or two to think about it. At present my idea is to be either an architect or a soldier."

"You are an odd fish, Rex," said my uncle. "We will see about it to-morrow. Good night; don't sit up smoking any longer."

I was about to follow my uncle's example and go to bed, when Professor Wrightson intercepted me. Looking round, I perceived we were the only persons in the room; the smokers had gradually melted away while I was talking.

CHAPTER VII.

A SCIENTIFIC MARVEL.

"Nec te Pythagorae fallant arcana renati."

"DO you believe in metempsychosis?" asked Professor Wrightson. "Excuse my abrupt way of asking questions, but I judge from your conversation that you are no sophist, but a true philosopher."

What a character one gets by being a good listener! My chief conversation that evening had been puff after puff of the regalia. But the Professor's question rather startled me, considering what I actually knew. Was this man something more than a mere

sciolist? Could he have any inkling of my wondrous experience?

He induced me to sit down and talk awhile, and have one more glass of something cool. He broke into strange parodox.

"All things in nature, I hold, are capable of flux and reflux. The modern theories of development are only a part of a much wider theory. Humanity is Protean. There is no reason in the world why, if we desire to do it, we should not develop wings in our children, if not in ourselves, and make the air our highway. Let us take a lesson from the bees, marvellous geometers, marvellous physiologists—of whom Virgil admirably says,

'His quidam signis atque haec exempla secuti,
Esse apibus partem divinae mentis et haustus
Aetherios dixere: Deum namque ire per omnis
Terrasque tractusque maris caelumque profundum.'

They change the sex of their offspring

when necessary, by administering particular food. Now, can you keep a secret?"

The Professor paused, anxiously.

"O yes," I replied.

"I am trying a similar experiment. I was born a female; I am gradually developing myself into a male. Whiskey and cigars I find the best means of doing it. When I have fully carried out my scheme, I shall patent it. It will be a fortune. Just think of the number of women in England alone who are pining to be men. I should charge a hundred pounds each—dirt cheap, you know—and if I metamorphose ten thousand women in the first year, that will be a clear million."

The Professor spoke with such an air of absolute conviction, that I did not know what to make of him and his theory. I went on smoking.

"The gradual change in me is very curious. But that it was requisite to keep the experiment secret, in view of the various prejudices of mankind, I should have had myself photographed at different stages of progress. This I shall certainly do with my clients, when my scheme is matured. The power of mind over matter has never been thoroughly recognised, still less understood. It is capable of entirely changing the aspect of the world."

"Nothing of the kind has ever been done before," I remarked.

"That proves nothing, if even it be true. There must be a discoverer of all nature's arcana. But discoveries may be forgotten and remade. Could the Pyramids and Stonehenge have been built without steam? Were there not steamships in Homer's time? As to my theory, what is the meaning of

the myth of Proteus, of the Centaurs, of the Amazons? Depend on it, the antique poets knew something of that law of universal change which I am gradually and painfully establishing.

"It is very strange," was all I could reply. The man looked so confoundedly in earnest, that I saw clearly he was either a sage or a madman.

We talked for some time longer—into the small hours. The Professor was a fascinating talker. If what he said was incredible, he invested it with a halo of plausibility. There was a curious magnetism in the man (or woman?) and he told me stories of mesmerism, spiritualism, and other preternatural wonders, such as transcended anything I had heard before. I don't know whether I had drunken too much brandy and soda, or smoked too

many cigars, but I felt in an offuscated state, and as I listened to this epicene professor, I was as much under his influence as those who heard the story of the Ancient Mariner.

The sleepy footman waiting in the anteroom must heartily have wished we would go to bed: but Professor Wrightson's talk flowed on like an endless stream, and I felt as if to interrupt it were impossible.

Suddenly interruption came. The sleepy footman threw open the door, and two stalwart men entered. The Professor, who was so seated that he could see the door, sprang to his feet and gave a tremendous yell like an Indian war whoop. Not one yell, but an infinite series, each of which seemed louder than the last. I was wide awake now, but had no time to interrogate the intruders, who had got hold of the Professor in about half a minute, and rendered him powerless with a strait

waistcoat—not, however, before he had abortively hurled a soda-water bottle at them, smashing a large mirror on the wall. He went on yelling, and to such a purpose that in a few minutes the smoking-room was full of half-dressed people.

My father came forward and said, as well as I could hear him for the Professor's yells,

"What is the meaning of this disturbance?"

"Very sorry, sir," said one of the men, "but this gent is a lunatic, escaped from Dr. Middleton's. I don't know how he got in here, but he's terrible cunning. We've been looking for him near a fortnight."

Only too true. A cunning lunatic (he had been a tutor originally, and overworked a rather weak brain) had contrived to pass muster among my father's guests. He had

also talked to me a great deal of rubbish which, in that smoking-room atmosphere, I took for high philosophy. As I reflected on this adventure in the solitude of my own room, where I found it unnecessary to light a candle, so bright was the full moon, I thought both my father and I had made mistakes. He had kept too open a house: I had kept too open a mind. Neither is wise.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CONCLAVE.

"This place [Milton's ideal Academy] should be at once both school and university, not needing a remove to any other house of scholarship, except it be some peculiar college of law or physic, where they mean to be practitioners: but as for those general studies which take up all our time from Lily, to commencing (as they term it) master of art, it should be absolute."

BREAKFAST next morning was a most amusing assemblage. Everybody was full of fun or curiosty or both. Plenty of chaff flew about as to the varied and not always sufficient costume worn by those whom the Professor's indefatigable ear-splitting yells had brought into the smoking-room at dead of night. We came to no definite theory as

to the meaning of these yells, and of the scene generally, so a whole bundle of imaginary hypotheses were brought out for our benefit. My father did not appear. A long course of early rising in connexion with the Stock Exchange had caused him to like indolent fashions for a change: he and my mother usually breakfasted in his own rooms, even when the house was full of company. The guests had their option of breakfasting where they liked and when: and indeed it was always understood at Romayne Court that dinner was the only set meal. *Fay çe que voudras* was the motto at all other times.

I lounged into the garden after breakfast, amusing myself with the bizarre recollections of the night precedent. My father, an experienced man of the world, was the last person in whose house you would expect to

find an escaped lunatic. As for me, having had seventy-seven years of remembered life, and having been a student for many years of the time, it seemed odd that I should be taken in by the extravagant platitudes of a maniac. I felt slightly ashamed of myself.

In the garden I met my uncle Paul, who told me that Dr. Grindley was coming over in the afternoon, and Algernon with him, and that there would then be a serious discussion as to the future proceedings of us two youngsters. Hereat I was well pleased: I wanted something settled. I was specially anxious to transfer stockbrokery to Algy, who I knew would acquit himself well in that line of business.

The conclave met. My father and mother, Uncle Paul, the Doctor, Algy, and I. We were requested to state our wishes. I repeated mine.

"I wish to be an architect or a soldier. I do not wish to decide at once. I want to study England first."

"You would rather not be a stockbroker?" said my father.

"Certainly not, sir."

"And you don't want to go to college?" asks my uncle.

"I would much rather not."

Now Dr. Cicero Grindley held Milton's opinion, that colleges would be unnecessary if schools did their duty to the full, and I had unconsciously enlisted him on my side.

"Marchmont major is right," he said. "Give him four years more with me, as a private student, and I will engage to teach him both architecture and the art of war. After that he can carry out his excellent plan of studying England, for which as yet he is too young."

"This sounds rather unpractical, Doctor," said my father; "but I am a great believer in your judgment, and I wish both the boys to have their way in the world, within reasonable limits. What do you think about it, Paul?"

"I think," replied my uncle, "that Rex's fancies are not unreasonable, and that under Dr. Grindley's guidance he may do well. You must keep a tight rein, Doctor," he continued, "for I see the boy is full of wild ideas that demand restraint. Don't let him imagine himself a man before his time."

"I'll take care of that," quoth the Doctor, rather grimly.

"Now, Algy," says my father, "it is your turn. What do you want to be?"

"A stockbroker, Papa, and as soon as possible. I am tired of school."

"What say you to that, Dr. Grindley?"

said my father, while Algernon looked on with anxious eyes.

"I think he chooses rightly. He will make a good man of business, I judge: and it is not too early for him to begin."

"Not at all," said my sire. "I'll send him up to town this week. Why, Reginald, Algernon will be a man before you have left school."

"All right, sir," I said. "I should like to be a boy as long as I possibly can."

My mother gave me an approving smile.

The result of this conference was that I returned to Birchanger Park with Dr. Grindley, and that Algy went to some court in the neighbourhood of Throgmorton or Threadneedle Street, where Messrs. Marchmont & Co did mysterious business. At the end of the current term I vacated my position in the sixth form of the school, remain-

ing as the Doctor's private pupil. That omniscient indefatigable man taught me architecture with the enthusiasm of Ruskin, and the art of war with the energy of my Uncle Toby. And I had plenty of football and cricket, of riding and rowing, and spent four of the jolliest years I remember in all my experience.

Why did I do this? it may be asked. I wanted to prolong my boyhood. Now, reader, I put the matter to you—whichever sex you belong to. Suppose you had once been a boy, and become a man—or once a girl, and become a woman—and were fortunate enough to get a second innings as a boy or girl—wouldn't you retard your development into manhood or womanhood as long as possible? I did. I fear that many a time I shocked dear Dr. Grindley, which was a great shame: but I positively

could not control my animal spirits. I, who ought, as he gravely and sadly said, to show a good example to boys younger than myself, was always leading them into mischief. It was too true; I positively could not help it. How the Doctor tolerated me, I could not imagine, except that he delighted in my intelligent appreciation of his prelections on architecture, (Ægyptian, Etruscan, Greek, Gothic, κ. τ. λ.) and the art of war (from the club of Cain to the last refinement in artillery).

Yes, I was a nuisance. Now, here is a case in point: Tom Wetheral had succeeded me as captain of the school. We two, and Ralph Pollock of the Sixth, formed a triumvirate. It occurred to us one day that we should like some devilled turkey. About four miles off, Farmer Cullamore had a fine brood of white turkeys: we resolved to steal

one. Off we went at sunrise one autumn morning, and picked out a splendid cock, and had just put him to a prompt and easy death, when the screams of the rest of the flock brought out the farmer's daughter, a buxom wench of five-and-twenty. These white turkeys were her peculiar care. She came rushing out across the garden into the field beyond, with nothing on but a chemise and a petticoat. She used emphatic language. I immediately kissed her; so did Pollock. Tom couldn't; he was embarrassed by the turkey. Off we ran homeward.

Of course Farmer Cullamore turned up at Birchanger in the course of the morning . . . not, however, before we had surreptitiously devilled our turkey, and found it devilish good. He used stronger language than his daughter, talked seriously of sending for the police, and identified us without

much difficulty—for the old boy was shaving at his bed-room window when we committed the theft, and nearly cut his throat in his rage when he saw me kiss his daughter.

"The boys shall all be well flogged," says the Doctor. "And they shall pay you the value of the bird, Mr. Cullamore."

"No, thank ye, Doctor," replies the worthy farmer. "Let 'em have their whacking: they deserve it: I won't have their money."

And off he went.

The Doctor gave us—me especially—quite a pathetic lecture, before he pitched into us. I was always sorry for the dear old boy, for he could not of course understand the reason of my wild proceedings.

"I say," cried Pollock, when our little business was over, "old Grindley picked

out some of his A 1 birch this time. I shan't sit down for a week."

As for me, I that evening committed another escapade. I rode over to Wingfield station, left my cob at the Railway Inn, and took train for London. I was just in time to have supper at Evans's with comfort. I slept at the Tavistock, and breakfasted on a lobster. What a thing it is, after having been a man, and reached the age of jaded appetites, to become a boy again, and feel the joyous boyish hunger for lobsters and mischief, for rhubarb tarts and pretty girls. After breakfast I drove to Bond Street, and expended ten pounds in a very elegant bracelet.

Then, finding myself in London, and knowing that I should get into difficulty on my return to Birchanger, I thought I would amuse myself. I rushed down into

the City and called on Algernon. Wasn't he surprised and disgusted! I had on a straw hat, an old velveteen shooting jacket, cord trousers, heavy walking shoes. Algernon had the finest blue cloth coat, the most perfect canary-coloured waistcoat with diamond buttons and a massive watch-chain for adornment, trousers of a light lavender, patent leather boots. He didn't know what to say to me. He got me out of the office as soon as he could, and asked me if I would like to have some lunch.

"No, thanks," I said. "But how are you getting on, old fellow? Do you really *like* this sort of thing?"

"Of course I do. Do you really like staying at school when you ought to be of some use in the world? I can't understand you, Reginald."

Talking thus, we had got into Leadenhall

Street, and were in front of the "Ship and Turtle."

"Come in and have a bottle of champagne, Algy," I said. "You don't understand me, but I quite understand you. We shall get on very well, by-and-by."

We had our bottle of effervescent wine, and Algy's share was quite as much as he could carry.

"I believe you're a dev-dev-lish good fel-fel-low, Rex," says he, as we parted near the Bank of England. "Take my heart and lute—no, I mean my best wishes and kindest regards—to old What's-his name. Good-bye: I've got to bear some stock."

I hope he beared it all right.

I went to Covent Garden and ate peaches. I lounged about the West-end, and wondered if any of the old gentlemen in club windows of White's and Brooks's and

Boodle's were old enough to remember Ned Ellesmere. By-and-by, I started homewards, and got to Birchanger in the afternoon. To my great satisfaction, the Doctor was out: he had gone away early in the morning.

There was nothing to prevent my walking over to Farmer Cullamore's—I did so. It was a pleasant stroll, under hedgerow elms, through meadows abounding in mushrooms. I did not, however, go the whole way. Crossing by a stile from a field-path into a shady lane, I came suddenly upon Julia Cullamore, the young lady whose turkey I had stolen and devilled—whose lips I had audaciously kissed. She was a fine girl, and looked at me with a mixture of anger and admiration. What could I do but kiss her again? She did not scream. It is within the limits of possibility that,

having reached the mature age of twenty-five amid a population of young farmers, she might have been kissed before.

"Miss Cullamore," said I, "it was very wrong of us to kill your turkey."

"Father says you'd get well whipped for it," she rejoined. "I hope you did."

"Well, Miss Cullamore, I really don't think you ought to allude to such a very sore subject. I prefer to forget such unpleasant accidents."

"O, you talk fine. 'Tain't so easy to forget a good sharp smacking— *I* know that. But I'm going home again; so, good-bye."

"Wait a moment," I said. "Your father would not let us pay for the turkey, so I have brought you a little present. Will you wear it?"

I clasped the bracelet on her reddish wrist. White stones and green shone amid

the gold—emerald and aquamarine. The girl was delighted. She looked at the bauble, as it circled her arm, with an almost infatuate air. Then she said, looking at me earnestly,

"You may kiss me again, if you like."

As I walked home to Birchanger, I speculated somewhat sadly on the state of England's rural intellect. Alas, I fear the municipal intellect is not much better. And yet England is, without dispute, the world's foremost nation.

"By Jove!" thought I, "they manage things better in Mars."

CHAPTER IX.

DOT AND I.

"In the dreadful heaven above
There's a Power too strong by half;
For I like not, yet I love—
For I smile not, yet I laugh.

Ah, he may defy that Power,
And his life with gladness fill,
Who, in the consummate hour,
Has the strength to say *I will*?"

I THINK Dr. Grindley was not sorry when the time was over for cramming me with architecture and the art of war. He certainly dismissed me in the second week of June, 1861, with an air of satisfaction, promising however that he would

infallibly be at Romayne Court in time for my coming of age. O dear, that coming of age! Fancy twins coming of age, and one a stockbroker! I was in terror—mortal terror. I felt fain to run away until it was over. Algy, on the other hand, looked forward to the affair with great delight; and walked about the grounds, rehearsing to himself the speech he intended to make.

Meanwhile, I had much talk with Kitty, who showed eagerness to give me her confidence. I was quite surprised that my sister, with her beauty and wit and certainty of wealth, had not yet married. She talked over the matter with me, of her own accord.

"Rex," she said—we were under a great oak in the park, and there was a superb sunset, and the deer were curvetting wildly —"I don't think I shall ever marry."

"'Nobody asked you, sir, she said,'" was my rude reply.

"O indeed! A great many have asked me, Rex, and some of them very nice fellows; but I have a kind of feeling that I could never live with anybody who had a right to control my actions. I should like to be quite independent. I can't marry without love: and I don't believe I am capable of loving in the true sense of the word. I have studied the matter, Rex: I have read all I could find about love-making. There's *Romeo and Juliet;* very pretty verse, you know: but Romeo and Juliet strike me as a couple of foolish children, who ought to be whipt and sent to bed. It is all like sucking lollipops. Somebody recommended me, the other day, to read *Henrietta Temple*, as being the most delicious of love-stories: I can't make out which is the greatest goose,

Henrietta or her Ferdinand. That's a couple of examples: it seems to me incredible that clever men like Shakespeare and Disraeli could sit down and write such nonsense."

"Well, Dot," I replied, "I do not entirely agree with you. There is such a thing as real inalienable love, the result of two people meeting who are absolutely fitted one to the other. For every male soul a female soul is waiting. They may never meet: or, if they meet, they may be sundered by misfortune. If you should never see the man you can accept as lover and master, I advise you to retain your independence. There is no reason why a woman should not lead a happy life amid such circumstances. A perfect marriage is perfect happiness: better not to marry at all than marry imperfectly."

"How wisely you talk, Rex!"

"Don't I? I've got the gift of the gab, and the gift of prophecy. I'll bet you a diamond ring to a pair of gloves that you'll be in love before I come of age."

"You wild boy!" she said. "Come, it is late; we must dress for dinner. Now I'll run you to the wicket gate if you'll give me two minutes law."

"All right," I said.

Off she started, agile as a deer; showing strong fine ankles as she ran through the fern. Alas! I too easily overtook her, and had vaulted the gate from the park into the gardens before she reached it.

"You're a wretch, Rex," she said.

"Remember our bet," I retorted. "I mean to win those gloves."

When I got to my room, I forgot to dress, and sat ruminating on the state of affairs.

Why didn't Kitty marry? I never saw a prettier girl except her mother and my lost Lucy; but the right man for her did not seem to arrive. My father meant to give her fifty thousand—as I knew and as a good many people guessed. Yet here she was, at four and twenty, unmarried, and thinking she should never marry.

So long did my cogitations last that the second dinner gong sounded, and I had not thought of preparation. I was too hungry to care about this; so I hurriedly washed my hands, and got down stairs just in time to take in to dinner a particularly prim maiden lady, old enough to be my grandmother. She scarcely touched my arm with the tip of her gloved finger; no wonder—I had on an old purple velvet shooting coat... purple originally, but now blending all the colours that glorify the woods in autumn. If a

painter could paint that coat, he could paint sunset. The superb ladies and gentlemen at the dinner table looked puzzled. Kitty laughed, for she knew my absent ways. Algernon, with the squarest of white ties, and quite a bouquet adorning the silk lappel of his Savile Row dress-coat, looked rather shocked. Capel Court is a hothouse for delicate plants.

It was a dull dinner. There were too many people. The old maid whom I had taken in to dinner was silent all the time, opening her mouth only to eat, which she did with a vengeance. To compensate, on my other side was a youthful widow of forty-five, who marked me down as her prey, and who talked more in a minute than Charles Matthews as *Captain Patter* could talk in an hour. She set her cap at me in the most amusing style; talked of her little

place in Kent, *so* charming, with *such* lovely grounds, and *such* nice society in the neighbourhood; said that her late husband had been a deep disappointment to her, and that she now was pining for a congenial spirit, who would make her life happy.

"And O how happy I would make him!" she exclaimed, gushingly.

"Won't you take some grapes?" I asked.

She gave me up, after that, and turned her artillery on a stout rubicund gentleman of twenty stone and thrice as many years.

I did not that evening go into the drawing-room. I played a game or two of billiards with Captain Harris, who always went to his billiards the moment wine-drinking ceased. That he beat me easily *va sans dire*. To be supreme at billiards (or anything else save one) you must work every day; and I have intense pity for the man

who works every day. Mr Bagehot notwithstanding, I believe that science, if widely developed and wisely applied, could abolish hard work.

I strolled off to the smoking-room, as some men came in who might give Harris the invincible a trifle more trouble. Nobody was there. I lighted a cigar, and lay on a couch, and indulged in reverie. It was not of the future, as might be expected from a youngster just coming of age; it was of the past in Earth, the past in Mars; it was of Lucy; it was of Alouette.

As I lay ruminating the door opened; entered my uncle Paul (who had been in London all day) and a friend. They did not see me; I was meditating in a remote corner. I could observe them at my leisure.

My uncle's friend was the handsomest ugly man I ever saw. His hair was black

horse-hair, and too much of it; his feet were beetle-crushers, and too much of them. His nose was a queer combination of hook and snub; his two eyes never looked the same way; his mouth was immensely large, with the right-hand corner up, and the left-hand corner down; he had a stubbly grey moustache, and a short iron-grey beard; his arms and legs were both a great deal too long for him. But those ill-matched eyes had strange keenness and wonderful depth of colour; and that vast mouth had marvellous power of expression; and when I heard the man speak, I felt that I had never before realised the possible music of the human voice. I would rather hear him speak than Mario sing.

"So here we are at last," said Uncle Paul, throwing himself lazily down. "As we've missed dinner, suppose we have a devil sent in here?"

"Right," replied the stranger.

A footman was in the room, and the order was given.

"Tired?" said my uncle.

"Never was yet. Only impatient. Want to get at the last act of 'Beauty and the Beast.'"

"It will soon come," quoth Paul Marchmont; "and the curtain will drop at the right moment."

The stranger unexpectedly lifted up that mellow voice of his, and carolled, *ex improviso*, and to a tune that seemed to have been made on the spur of the moment, and to have been considerably torn by the said spur.

"O, there was a Beast most frightful,
A million years ago,
Who dwelt in woods delightful,
And found it very slow:
And he barked, or brayed,
Or whinnied, or neighed . . .
'O, all that I want is a lovely maid
With breasts of rosy snow!'

O, there was a damsel of Beauty,
Like grapes in their autumn glow,
And she thought it was her duty
The meaning of this to know:
And she never ceased
To look at the Beast,
Till she went one morning to fetch the Priest.
Were they married?—I hope 'twas so."

I rose from my corner and came forward, as the footman entered to take my uncle's orders.

"Ah, Rex," said uncle Paul, "you here? Why not among the ladies, as is the manner of youth?"

"Not in the humour to-night, sir," said I. "Thought I would come here and smoke a solitary cigar, and ruminate on the possibility of coming of age without making a fool of oneself."

"Misanthrope or misogynist or both?" said my uncle. "No matter. Wake up now and amuse us. We are going to sup

in a corner. We desire not to enter the halls of white waistcoats and white satin. This, Rex, is Mr. Eustace Perivale, Queen's Counsel. And this boy, Perivale, is one of the twins that is painfully coming of age."

"Would it be considered irreverent, uncle," said I, "if I were to throw you out of window?"

"Decidedly," said Uncle Paul; "especially as there is supper on the road. Wait till that important meal is finished. Afterwards we may perhaps enter into questions of casuistry."

The ugly Q.C. made a tremendous meal. He got some excellent claret with his grill, but he positively had the face to grumble.

"There is but one liquid worth drinking, Marchmont," said he, "and that is London stout. It beats the best port in the world. You know my little place at Beckenham?—

I have had a silver tube laid down from there to Whitbread's brewery, and they pump a constant supply of their best stout."

"That silver tube must have cost something," said my uncle, gravely.

"Only a Roman Catholic infant, in Chancery," replied Perivale. "Lord bless you, Paul, you've no idea what a lovely profession the law is! Litigation is a perpetual epidemic. If you can only make the worse appear the better reason, you've a fortune—a perennial income in the palm of your hand. Only one can't be honest."

"Awkward!" said my uncle.

"Don't agree with you," said the Q.C., after swallowing a tumbler of champagne. "I think the lawyers have the best of it, and are more honourable than people of any other profession or vocation or trade."

"How so?"

"As thus. The lawyers *can't* be honest. Granted. Understood. Agreed. But other men, from the parson to the costermonger, *could* be honest if they would, but they *won't*. Now, Paul, my boy, which is the sheerest rascal, the man who can't be honest, or the man who won't?"

"Casuist!" quoth my uncle. "Come, I'll leave it to my nephew. What say you, Rex?"

"I say, sir, that a man who deliberately takes to a profession in which he can't be honest, must be either a fool or a knave; and I am told there are very few fools in the profession of the law. The difference between lawyers and other people seems to be this: others will be honest when honesty pays, but a lawyer would magnanimously lose money to gratify his lust for dishonesty!"

CHAPTER X.

COMING OF AGE.

ALOUETTE. To come of age! Do all men come of age, papa,
At the same moment?
ASTROLOGOS. Darling, not a bit of it.
I've known a man who never came of age at all,
Though he was ninety at his death.
I've known a man
Who came of age a baby in his bassinette,
And was a man before he spoke a syllable.
The Comedy of Dreams.

ALGERNON and I were very much alike; but I was an inch taller, and several inches more round the chest, and had a ruddy country skin, whereas his complexion was of the Burlington Arcade type. My hair was a curly mop: his savoured of

Truefit. As to dress, why, he was the *petit maître* of the City—the Capel Court dandy; while I could, by no process or persuasion, be brought to dress elegantly. Comfort and convenience were my idols. I was very glad to quote the example of Eustace Perivale, Q.C. He also dressed as he liked, did what he liked, behaved like a chartered libertine. I noticed he talked a deal to Dot.

One day he came to me down by the lake, where I was mooning about, and abruptly said,

"Marchmont, should you object if I were to ask your sister to marry me?"

I looked at him for a moment. That grotesque face of his was graver than common. There was a light in the eye, a tremor on the lip.

"Why ask me?" I said.

"Because you are the only person who needs asking, except Mrs. Marchmont, and I dare not approach her yet. Now come, old fellow, tell me what you think. I am devilish ugly, I know; but I can wile a bird out of its nest, or a verdict out of a jury. I saw Miss Marchmont at the Opera one night last season and was hit hard. It took me an immense time to find out who she was. But your uncle and I are of the same club—the Chandos, and so I managed to get at the fact. He brought me down here. I have seen Miss Marchmont, but have said no word to her. When I last spoke to your uncle on the subject, he said —'*Talk to Rex.*' Now, my dear boy, I *must* have your sister: she is the only woman in the world I could love."

"She'll have fifty thousand pounds, Perivale," I said.

"Ha!" with a deep sigh. "I wish I could get your father to keep that fifty thousand pounds till we want it. I'm making twelve thousand a year, and refusing briefs right and left. I've refused a judgeship twice."

I laughed inwardly. I acknowledged the strength and nobility of the man, cased grotesquely: the question was, would Dot similarly appreciate him? After a moment's reflexion, I said . . .

"Shall I talk to my sister, Perivale? Or do you prefer to go straight to her yourself?"

"I never saw judge or jury I was afraid of," he said, "but I am rather afraid of Miss Marchmont. You know I'm ugly . . . damned ugly; and she is O so beautiful! The world never saw anything like her."

I thought of the infinitely higher beauty of my pupil, Mavis Lee.

"Well," I said, "I'll go and talk to Dot the first chance."

"O I wish I might call her Dot!" whispered the sore-stricken Queen's Counsel.

Kitty was out that day—at a garden party in the vicinage. When she came home it was late: dinner was long over: my mother, always early, had gone to bed. I had given orders that my sister's arrival should be mentioned to me: and a servant brought the news as I was just finishing a game of billiards with the Q.C., who played abominably.

When I went up to the child's boudoir, there she was, in a pretty undress, tired evidently, yet with the light of a past enjoyment in her lovely eyes. Pleasure and fatigue are twins, fatigue a moment later born.

"Ah, Rex," she said, with a gay smile, "have you come to lecture me? You schoolboys think you know everything. Come, what is it?"

"Have you still quite decided to be an independent old maid, Dot?"

"O dear no! I saw a lovely curate and a most exquisite ensign at our party to-day. They both made love to me. They both lisped. They both blushed . . . much better than I could."

"Will you blush if I mention the name of Eustace Perivale, Dot?"

"O Rex! He *is* so good, but I don't think I am good enough for *him*."

"Yes, darling, you are," I said. "Your very faults are beautiful in his eyes. But you told me not long ago you could never love anybody—and that you could never obey anybody."

"Did you never alter your mind, Rex dear?" she asked. "I had never seen anybody then that I could love, or that I should like to obey. I have now. *Rex!*"

"Yes."

"You'll tell papa, won't you?"

"O yes."

"And, *Rex!*"

"Well."

"Tell Eustace I'm gone to bed."

"Ay, I'll tell him that, and a lot more that will drive him half mad."

"You wretch! *Rex!*"

"Well, you monkey."

"Isn't he most delightfully ugly?"

CHAPTER XI.

FIVE TREE HILL.

Change is the law of all things save the soul of man.
Which, being divine, is utterly unchangeable.
The Comedy of Dreams.

EASY as was the distance from Romayne Court to Five Tree Hill, I only rode over two or three times during my school-days. In truth, my first visit disgusted me. There were no coaches now on the road, no merry bustle at the Romayne Arms when the guard's horn was heard in the early morning, and all the outside passengers wanted lamb's wool. The natty little inn of my memory had degenerated to a wayside pub-

lic-house, whose occupier could scarcely live. It was kept by a fellow called Eastmond, who was always intoxicated.

Beau Sejour was closely shut up, and I could neither obtain access to it, nor ascertain to whom it now belonged. After wandering awhile in the shadow of Saint Apollonia's Chapel, I rode back disgusted. The dream of my former life was harshly dispelled. Once or twice afterwards I rode over, but the place was melancholy; it was like entering a chamber where you had left the woman you loved, happy and full of life, and finding her a corpse. I was not particularly sentimental, for my second boyhood seemed to neutralize my previous manhood, even as complementary colours produce white light. So, finding that I could not satisfactorily renew my reminiscences of Five Tree Hill, I gave it up and

enjoyed my school life—played cricket and football, and wrote Greek verse, and drank for a second time the new clear unfermented wine of life. I wish I had power to efficiently describe the intense delight which I found in passing through a second boyhood with a clear recollection of my first. No man can understand the taste of good wine who has drunken but one bottle; or can know what poetry is, having read but one poem, however good; or can intelligently appreciate the beauty of woman, having seen but one woman in the world.

The problem came often into my mind, after I had left school and made some slight progress into the deeper waters of the world . . . *Can I love again?* Perchance, to the ordinary reader, this may seem absurd: but I was unable to forget Lucy, whose pure and beautiful soul had vanished

from the earth with mine. Ah, where had that sweet spirit dwelt all these years? There is no identifying a disembodied and reëmbodied spirit. Surely there ought to be a spiritual telegraphy, whereby two severed souls could hold communion, though one were in Sirius and the other in Aldebaran. We want a seraph-Scudamore, unchecked by the Supernatural Treasury.

Now, if I could only have found Lucy, I should have been happy. But here was I, after wandering through another planet, again cribbed and confined by the stringent laws of earthly necessity. I could not break those laws, except by committing suicide, for which I felt not the slightest inclination: so I determined to take matters with a calm philosophy, and to go on my travels in search of adventure.

I was much amused at the way in which

I was evidently regarded by my immediate relations. My father thought me a fool of genius, and, as he had plenty of money, and more common sense than any man I ever met, he determined to let me sow my wild oats in my own way, believing that, the process over, I should grow reasonably wise. Having a model stockbroker in Algy, who already was making quite a sensation in Capel Court by the originality of his devices, he could afford to let me run wild.

My mother's judgment of me was rather mixed. I was her favourite boy; I learnt all she taught me so readily—and why not? since I had taught her: but there seemed in her mind sometimes a kind of perplexity about me. With my knowledge of the facts, I often wondered whether there was a kind of half-memory of the past which flashed upon her in moments of the clear-

est intuition. Did she sometimes vaguely dream of Five Tree Hill, and the old quaint house, and Saint Apollonia's Chapel, and her tutor?

My uncle Paul, I am certain, thought there was about me something unusual and not at once explicable. He never said a word, but I often perceived that he was puzzling himself about me. *What* he thought, I cannot say: he is one of the most reticent of men: also he is one of the most persistent in pursuit of the clue to any difficult question. I do not at this moment know whether he has reached a conclusion: this true story might help him, but I perfectly well know he won't read it. Because it is in three volumes he will think it is a novel, and be quite unaware that it contains the verification and rectification of an ancient philosophic theory.

Algernon thought, and still thinks me, a fool. Dot—well, I don't quite know Dot's thoughts—but one day, when I had been giving the lovely light-hearted child a lecture, she said,

"Upon my word, Rex, you talk as if you were a thousand years old."

And really Dot, though three years my senior, seems quite a baby to me. As my father kindly and wisely left me to my own devices, I carried out my project, and walked through England. I decided to walk, because it secures a man perfect independence. Possibility of accident varies as the square of the number of integers: if a man rides, he is four times as likely to get into difficulty as if he walks.

My adventures during this period would make a book in themselves, and can by no possibility be narrated here. All this time,

while I was traversing the dear old land, with open eyes for its beauty and character, open ears for bird-music and human wit, open nostrils for odour of rose and meadow-sweet, Algernon was upbuilding a colossal fortune for the great firm of Marchmont & Co. Algernon was a director of the Bank of England before I had made up my mind to be anything. In my desire to be either an architect or a soldier, I had scientifically examined all the cathedrals and all the fortifications in England, and had reached the inference that the cathedrals were better than the forts.

I was at home at intervals—indeed, I had a grand time of it when Dot became Mrs. Perivale. The Stock Exchange was grandly represented, and the presents that came from the Stock Exchange would have been welcomed by a bride of the Blood Royal. My

gift might have been unique. A week or two before the wedding, I was sitting on a stile near Ashridge Park in Hertfordshire. It was green summer weather: the foliage cooled the eyes: the turf cooled the feet. A bird sang. I looked up in surprise. Never had I heard that peculiar bird-note, which I am not musician enough to jot down, except in Mars. The lovely singer rose into ether, with a sunset on his wings, and as he rose he dropt something that looked like a star as it fell on the grass. I searched for it: it was a thin gold ring with one sapphire in it about the size of a sixpence, cut *en cabochon*: and in the very core of that sapphire was a single point of red, as bright as fire—and, as I afterwards found, light-giving in the depth of darkness. I divined at once that this was a gift from the good old King of Mars, designed for my sister's wedding-day.

I put the ring on my little finger, and walked on toward the tavern where I designed to sleep. I never wear a ring, so I was fidgetted by this one, and turned it round and round on my finger. As I crossed a pleasant meadow-path, I saw a country love-making couple coming toward me. Just as I passed them, the boy said to the girl:

"Why, I thought I saw a gentleman coming along the path. Didn't you, Bet?"

"Ay, I did, sure. A tall man he was. O, I'm afeard, Tom. It must have been a ghost."

I had stood still within a yard, and was listening to them. They could not see me. Connecting this phenomenon with the ring, I noticed that I had turned the stone inside. I shifted it to its proper place. The young woman suddenly exclaimed:

"Why, there's the gentleman, Tom! We was looking the wrong way."

Walking on towards my inn, I tried the stone, and found it efficient. I walked up to a bull without his knowing it, and caught a partridge that was lying snug among the turnips. When I reached the little inn at which I meant to sleep, I entered unseen. Clearly, this ring had magical powers.

"Shall I give it to Dot?" I thought, as I sat over my tough mutton-chops and Coliseum sherry—"shall I? Why, what may the young monkey be tempted to do, if she finds she can at will render herself invisible. The eleventh commandment—Thou shalt not be found out—is rendered nugatory by a ring like this. No, by Jove, I'll keep it myself."

I did, and gave Kitty instead the finest set of pearls in Europe. I don't believe

they are paid for yet. I have the ring to this day, and am extremely glad I did not give it to Kitty. It might have demoralized that child, and I have found it useful.

Wandering still from place to place in England, whenever the weather was fine, I walked one day into the principal inn at Redborough. I was going home to Romayne Court: but a long day's walk had tired me, and I thought I would dine and sleep there and go home next morning. When the morning came, I felt enterprising, and determined to pay one more visit to Five Tree Hill. The ghost of Doctor Romayne, the memory of Mavis and of Lucy, seemed to drag me thither. I had reason to be glad that I went.

The Romayne Arms was as dull as ever, but I entered it, inspired by a kind of intuitive curiosity, and learnt from the stolid

landlord that there were some ladies staying for a time at Beau Sejour.

"Real ladies, your honour," says the landlady. "I can't make out the names, and the groom is that short he a'most bites your nose off: but they're real ladies, and no flies."

I told this chattering Mrs. Eastmond that I should want a bed that night, and then I strolled down that steep hill-side, where the foliage was heavier now, where I had walked so many many years. This path I had walked with Mavis. In that room whose windows I could see, shining in the westering sun, Lucy had held my dying hand. The old house had life in it now. I longed to enter it, and see.

After lingering at the gate, I descended to Saint Apollonia's Chapel. As I went down the hill I felt a strange magnetism.

Something drew me forward. You see the quaint old chapel of the dentist-saint some time before you reach the foot of the hill; and on an immemorial stone I saw a woman sitting . . . a woman? a girl, but how like Lucy! The nearer I came the more tremulous I grew. She was not looking at me, this child; she was looking at the unutterable beauty of the sunset. Simply dressed, she was; a girl-woman; brown-haired, with fleck of gold that seemed alive; eyes bluer than the bluest summer sky; a sweet spiritual flexure of motion; a wonderful inborn life and light that flashed through and through her. She was dressed in pure white, with one royal red rose in her bosom.

I do not think any moments of any life of mine as yet gone through were so calmly enjoyable as while I leaned on the old

lichen-grown rough stone wall, and looked at this girl. Her likeness to my lost Lucy was perfect. As I remembered my Thames-side darling—ah, how many, many years ago!—I can hardly help thinking that here she is again . . . always loving, always young. Ah, it cannot be! This is some chance resemblance, nothing more.

I stood watching this girl, with my elbows leaning on the old stone wall, till the sunset faded, and the sky grew grey, and she, with a slight shiver, rose from her position. Youthful still, I could not help speaking to her: she did not seem in the least degree frightened. I said something about the beauty of the evening: weather's the king of talk-topics. She accepted my escort to her garden-gate with that divine unconsciousness which is the beauty of serene maidenhood. At that gate we parted. I said,

"I used to know some one who lived in this old-fashioned house. Might I call to look at it, do you think? I am staying for a night or two at the little inn."

And then I told her my name, and where I lived.

"If Mamma is well enough, Mr. Marchmont, I am sure she will be delighted," said the young lady. "She is very feeble and nervous, but sometimes a new visitor cheers her up. I will let you know to-morrow morning."

This was at the garden-gate. A full moon was shining. "The devil's in the moon for mischief." The moon shone straight into this beautiful creature's eyes, and made strong sapphires of them; shone also on her fair soft skin, and made it lovelier in its rosy whiteness than ivory would be if you could distil upon it the

ruddy juice of all Persia's roses; touched her ruby lips with so delicious a dewy-light that, on the honour of a gentleman, I could not help kissing them. She ran away into the depths of the shrubbery: I, left alone, went to the Romayne Arms, ate, drank, slept.

Dreamt, moreover. In my dreams I identified this girl with Lucy. Gods, how like they were! The same colour of hair and eye, the same sweet fluent movement of form, of foot, of finger, the same wonderful translucence of the soul that maddened me into ineffable love at Twickenham, years ago . . . that miraculous transparency of soul, as if Lucy were a lamp of the purest plate-glass, with the strongest electric light burning at her heart's core.

" A woman who is light from heart to eye,
A woman who is love from eye to heart;
That is true beauty. Ah, on life's rough chart
Mark down the place of meeting ere you die,
If you have met such woman. Never sigh
If she desire you to dwell far apart:
Just to have made a vein of anger start
In her strong soul is something. Ah, but why
Is it that such a woman seldom sees
The man of calm imaginative brain,
The man who loves the birds and flowers and trees,
Who fathoms pleasure and finds power in pain?
One glance, one grasp, would make one flesh of these,
Yet go they wandering round the world in vain."

CHAPTER XII.

GRACE.

" Gratia cum Nymphis geminisque sororibus audet
Ducere nuda choros."

WHEN next day I called at Beau Sejour I was readily admitted. The people at the Romayne Arms had told me that the dwellers here were Mrs. and Miss Smith. The young lady did not strike me as looking much like what society anticipates from a Smith, even if there has been metamorphosis to Smyth or Smythe or Smijth or Ssmith. However, we have all known some remem-berable Smiths. . . James, Horace, Sidney.

It is indeed the greatest of Teuton names. Smith means smiter, whether on anvil or on helm of foe: a great soldier was a war-smith in the elder time. The name is a good name, by no man to be despised.

Still I felt doubtful whether Smith was the true name of the languid lady whom I found in the room I had known so well long years ago. She had been handsome—very; but, ah, she was very, very tired. The light seemed asleep in her eyes. It was an evident trouble and weariness to raise her hand—even to turn her eyes. I have never seen anyone who seemed so worn out; and it was long before her time.

She was indolently courteous. She was glad I felt any interest in the house. I was welcome to come whenever I liked. She had come there for quiet, but she willingly received an intelligent visitor. Languid and

weary as she was, she could be loquacious on occasion. I, for my part, wondered whether she would ever drop her garrulity, and collapse into quietude. I did not see her often after this, for she was always ailing: but I did see her daughter Grace. We had many happy hours together.

Mrs. Smith was a very sensible woman. She could not conquer her especial nervous affection, brought on chiefly by mental disturbance; and she was most anxious that her daughter should not suffer by constant attendance upon her. So, when she saw me, and saw that I was a man not likely to treat a lady otherwise than courteously, she gave Grace leave to ramble about with me, and we explored the vicinage thoroughly. Given the Chapel of Saint Apollonia as a centre, and a radius of five miles will give you, whether archae-or-geo-or-ornithological, a very fine

field of observation. It is a beautifully rich region. They were expecting me at Romayne Court, and I saw its sloping roofs many a time in the sunset, as Grace and I wandered together : but they waited for me in vain till I had made myself most intimate with Grace. I stayed on at the Romayne Arms, to the delight of the chattering landlady, and the detriment of my digestion.

How unutterably joyous are the hours spent in this pleasant way by youthful lovers whose love is stainless! Although perfectly happy in the present, reminiscences of the past and fears for the future troubled me. Once I had loved and lost what I loved: now I loved again, a girl so like Lucy Lovelace that they might have been twin-sisters; and I often had times of terror lest some unanticipated misfortune should part us. Often this fear came upon me at night,

driving sleep away beyond the reach of hope, causing it to fly from my grasp as a migratory sea-bird flies far across the distant hills, and is lost in the vague grey-line that follows the sunset. Then, leaving my room at the Romayne Arms I would steal out in the depth of night into the well-remembered garden of Beau Séjour, and watch alternately my lady's window, and that great procession of the stars which he who knows its meaning can never tire of watching. Then at sunrise I would go down to Saint Apollonia's Chapel, and have my matutine refresher in the clear stream, and return to breakfast with an amazing appetite.

All this time I had not talked love to Grace, in any direct way. We were playing the game in boy and girl fashion. I felt indeed loth to move too fast: the rapid and

prompt love-making of my earlier time had given place to delight in delay. Grace and I rambled and loitered, poetized and botanized: we never seemed to be at a loss for topics of pleasant chat, though indeed it was delightful when there came upon us the silent mood, and we sat hand in hand upon some mossy bank, watching the lovely play of the clouds, the endless ripple of the stream, and wondering why the world was filled so full of beauty. There was a magnetism in the touch of our hands which sufficed to make us both completely content. I do not remember any moments of life so peaceful as these. When Grace's tremulous fingers rested in mine, my fears and my fancies vanished. It was when alone that the terrible thought would come upon me . . .

"Perhaps I may never see her again."

My relation to this child was duplex. I

had the passionate feeling of hot youth, and could have clasped her to my arms with a wild impulse of absorption, if I had not been calmed and controlled by my first, my elder self. Experience had taught me that beautiful pure rosebuds should not be plucked too soon: and I felt the absolute philosophic truth of Fouqué's exquisite conception, Undine, in whom her lover must create, or rather develop, a soul. My fancies dwelt in the regions of the higher love-poetry: I was in a Spenserian rather than a Shakespearian mood. But in Grace there was more than in gentle Edmund's Una: there was more than in any of Shakespeare's women, not excepting even my favourite Rosalind: there was that luminous transparency of character which I had never seen in any woman save my lost Lucy. And she had the same magnetism: not living

[illegible] were seemed [illegible]

[illegible] water- [illegible] christened

[illegible] eye.

[illegible] show my- [illegible] though [illegible] eccentricity would [illegible] absence. Thus had [illegible] mornings after a [illegible] walked up Five Tree [illegible] unexpected sight . . . a mail [illegible] the gate of Beau Sejour. A

footman holding the horses' heads, while another footman stood at the cottage gate. It was a well-appointed equipage, and plenteous silver gleamed upon the harness of a noble pair of roans. I grew alarmed. Who could thus be calling at so early an hour on simple quiet Mrs. Smith?

Of course it was out of the question for me to call and inquire, even had I been in suitable costume: but I was very loose and damp, cravated with a towel, so I made my way back to the inn. Looking from my bedroom window, just as I had finished dressing, I was rather surprised to see my brother Algy. He was strolling up and down as if waiting for somebody; and there was a curious complacent look on his face, which I had often noticed when he thought he was doing something clever. Having no particular wish to see him at that moment,

I sat down by the window and smoked. Presently the mail-phaeton I had seen at Beau Sejour gate drove up to the inn door: the driver was a very handsome aristocrat of fifty perhaps... at any rate his hair and moustache were white. He got out of the carriage with difficulty, and walked quite lame. My brother came up to him, and through the open window I heard him say,

"I hope your interview was satisfactory, my lord."

"What a fool you are, Marchmont!" he said, in a voice so harsh that it resembled nothing so much as a coffee-mill. "Nobody ever yet had a satisfactory interview with a woman—and nobody ever will."

Algernon took his snubbing with angelic submission, and followed his lordship into the inn. I of course did not go down. In about twenty minutes they came out and

drove away, and it was pretty clear they were going to Romayne Court. Then I went down and found a little note on my breakfast table. It was from Grace. It ran thus:

"DEAR REX,

[I had taught her to call me Rex, and I called her Regina—and fifty other foolish fantastic names],

"Please don't come to see me for a few days. Some one has called who has made Mamma very ill, and I must not leave her till she is better. You know how nervous she is. I can't tell you anything about her trouble, for I only half guess myself, and perhaps I am quite wrong.

"I will send a note the minute poor Mamma is well enough for me to see you. You won't go far away, will you?

"REGINA."

Well, I wrote the poor child a note, and then I started for Romayne Court, thinking that I might as well put in an appearance during this opportunity, and that I might also approximate to a solution of the mail-phaeton mystery myself. Of course I gave strict orders that if any note came for me in my absence, it should be sent on by instant courier. My little girl should not wait for me a moment.

Walking into the pleasant lawns of Romayne Court, dusty-footed, knapsack on shoulder, I looked somewhat unlike the probable inheritor of that domain. It was now afternoon: I heard chatter and laughter and clatter of balls. The girls were out at croquet. The bishop of the Diocese, whose croquet is as orthodox as his theology, was carrying everything before him. Bishop Lyndon is the best ladies' man on the

bench, and writes the loveliest album verses. At an acrostic or a charade he is unrivalled. Here is Kitty's "copy of verse:"

"Kitty is beautiful and young,
I am, alas, a world too old
To celebrate her locks of gold,
To tell the music of her tongue.
Yet she might make Methusaleh bold!"

Kitty and the Bishop were in full flirtation as I crossed the croquet lawn. I did not go up to the gay group, but Dot saw me as I passed through a yew archway, and came flying after me, and gave me a shower of kisses.

"O Rex, I am so glad to see you. What a wanderer you have been!"

"Mamma well?" I asked.

"Very; I think she has never been in higher spirits. Uncle Paul said the other day at lunch, 'I wonder where Rex is?'

'O,' said mamma, 'he's safe enough. We shall see him soon. I dare say he's making love to somebody.' Papa laughed."

"I hope Perivale is here, Dot," I said. The young monkey pinched me.

"No, he is not; but he is coming to-morrow, the dear ugly old boy."

"And you like him still?"

"Don't I? He is so clever. I used to think you clever, Rex, but he knows everything. And then he is so modest and gentle and brave. I say, Rex dear, don't tell anybody—I mean him to be Lord Chancellor."

"Well done, Dot!" said I; "a capital Chancellor he'll make; there's not so able a lawyer in England. I shall see you a peeress yet, my child. By the way, is Algy here?"

"O yes. O, I want to tell you. Algy came this morning with an old gentleman in

a carriage and pair, and they had a long talk with papa; and the old gentleman is staying here, but keeps to his own rooms, and nobody is told his name. Isn't it mysterious?"

"He may be one of Algy's stockbroking friends," I said, "who has reasons for being out of the way. Never mind. Tell me if you hear anything. Go and amuse the Bishop: I must put myself in order, and then see the mater."

Dot ran back to her episcopal croquet, and I went to my rooms. It appeared to me there was something odd about this mysterious stranger—something rather beyond a stockbroking complication. The man looked unlike a stockbroker, and Algy had mylorded him. Why was he at Beau Sejour? How had his call made Grace's mother ill? These were the problems which I

tried to solve as I splashed and dressed.

My mother was alone in her own apartment, and we had our tea and gossip together. Between her and me was always full intellectual accord. She was the most willing listener to my stories of mild adventure. I resolved on this occasion that I would tell her about Grace. I put it all before her as well as I could, and did my best to describe the peculiar unique beauty of my darling. She seemed quite to understand.

"Ah, Rex," she said, "she will be a dear daughter, I know: but you must not let her make you forget me. It is very wrong, Rex, I know; but I can't help loving you better than Algy, or even Dot."

Did I wonder?

CHAPTER XIII.

HIS LORDSHIP.

Genius is often eaten through with bitterness,
By what may seem a very trifling accident.
The Comedy of Dreams.

THE day after my arrival at Romayne Court my father and I had a brief conversation in his private room. He was in the best of temper. Indeed it was a very rare thing for him to be otherwise: if a man who has perfect health and prosperity, and the best wife in the world, cannot maintain an equable temper, who can? Yet we know that many of the most fortunate men in the world are also the worst-tempered.

"Rex," he said, "I am glad to see you again. You have been quite a wanderer. I hope you have enjoyed your time. Some day I suppose you will think of settling down; but there is no hurry—not the least hurry. Algy has been so successful that he is quite independent of me, and will be richer than ever I have been: and Dot is engaged to marry Perivale, one of the most rising men at the bar: so you can go on taking holiday as long as you like. Indeed, unless you have some special fancy for occupation, I don't see why you need be anything but a country gentleman. This estate is quite enough for one man to manage, and I think the position of an English landed proprietor one of the happiest—perhaps the very happiest—in the world."

"You are very kind, sir," I answered. "I know no happier place in life."

"Well," went on my father, "when you have rambled long enough, settle down here and help me. There are lots of things to be done which I am too indolent to do effectively—some indeed which I am not qualified to effect. I want a perfect picture gallery and a perfect library: but really I am a mere ignoramus in pictures and books."

It certainly struck me that these ambitions of my father's were far wiser than his happily short-lived fancy for getting into Parliament: and I responded to them with enthusiasm, feeling quite willing to terminate my wanderings, now that I had seen Grace, and loved her.

"By-the-way, Rex," said my father, "there is a gentleman staying here who wants to be *incognito*: he is down on some family business in which Algy is helping him, and does not wish his name to be

known. So, when he is introduced as Mr. Johnson, don't say anything if you should happen to have met him. I don't care about that sort of thing myself: but Algy is a long-headed fellow, and I let him have his way."

"I am not likely to know him," I said, "for I have few acquaintances: but, in any case, his secret is safe with me."

When I left the paternal presence, I strolled into the gardens, which were in exquisite beauty, and enjoyed the odour and colour of innumerable flowers. There was nobody in the grounds yet; our guests for the most part were lazy, and lingered long over their luxurious breakfast. As I was rambling in a reverie, a lovely white figure came gaily tripping over the grass—it was Miss Dot, in some ethereal white stuff, rather like a cloud-fleece, sprinkled all over with bows of blue.

"I expect him every minute, Rex," she cried.

Him! When a girl expects all the world to recognize *Him*—and indeed thinks *Him* the only *He* in the world, things look serious. This was Dot's case. I tried to chaff her.

"Perhaps he won't come."

"O, won't he? Don't you talk nonsense to me, Rex. Ah! there he is!"

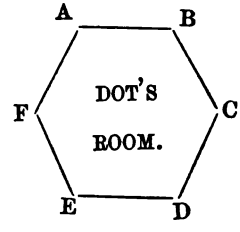
He was. A burly broad-shouldered ugly resolute eloquent man, striding across the lawn as if he were after the grouse. Dot ran into his arms without hesitation. She was not a bit ashamed of her love, dear child!

"Ha! Rex, I am glad to meet you here. May I have some breakfast? Came away without any, for I had to read a lot of briefs last night, and this morning I had no appetite. I knew I should be all right

down here; and I'm as hungry as a hunter now."

"Dot will give you breakfast, and feed you with kisses, I doubt not, if you think you can live upon them. Tell them to send something up to your own little room, Kitty, and I'll come and play propriety, and drink a glass of seltzer."

Dot's sanctum was in a turret—hexagonal—with three windows. Thus:



E D is the entrance from the house: F A, A B, B C, are embayed windows, looking far over park and woodland, and fertile country sprinkled with villages clustering

around ancient churches, and one great town, and one great river running to the sea. F E and D C are exquisitely filled by full-length life-sized portraits of my father and mother on panel. From B C there is a capital view of the main terraces on the south front of the house. I sat at the open window, while Dot gave Perivale his breakfast and he gave her his pleasant flattery, and watched the groups now coming out to enjoy the summer sunshine. Perivale had come with a field-glass over his shoulder—it was a first-class Dollond, with which I could scrutinize the faces of the people as if they were close to me . . . far better, indeed, since they did not know I was looking at them, and therefore did not put on the mask of hypocrisy. There were among the crowd few people whom I knew : but I liked examining the pretty vain

girls and the simpering self-satisfied swells, and trying to guess at their character. I wonder whether the seraphs similarly amuse themselves in looking through glasses of immense force at the population of a myriad orbs.

As I looked at the second of the three terraces, my father and Algy and "Mr. Johnson" came into focus. They were talking with curious earnestness. Algernon was the chief speaker; he was intensely animated; he talked fast, gesticulated, looked like a French orator. My father and Mr. Johnson seemed well pleased with all he said.

"What are you looking at, Rex?" asked Perivale, suddenly. He and Dot had noticed my interest in the scene.

"See for yourself."

I handed him the glass, and pointed out

to him the group of three. He examined them long and stedfastly; then he said,

"Who is the grey-haired man with your father, Rex?"

"A Mr. Johnson, I am told."

"*Duplex nomen malum omen*," quoth Perivale. "I have known him by another name. He is one of the most remarkable men in Europe, and one of the most unscrupulous. I hope he does not want to borrow money of your father?"

"I don't know. The old boy can afford to lose a little, I suppose. But can't you tell me more about this fellow, Perivale? What's his true name?"

"You've a right to know, Rex, but don't ask me to tell you this minute. He's a peer, he's a poet, and used to be enormously popular—long before your time."

"Much you know about my time," I thought.

"He wrote the maddest possible poetry —really good, you know, but fiercely mad —all because he was afflicted with a squint. Otherwise he was a splendid-looking fellow, but he still squints a little, though he has been tortured horribly by an infinite series of operators for strabismus. After every operation he wrote a madder poem than the last: and all the young ladies were in love with his verse till the sentimental style grew suddenly fashionable. When he found his books wouldn't sell, he quarreled with his publisher, and horsewhipped him, for which he was brought into Court, and had to pay heavy damages. Meanwhile, he had married . . . a lady of great beauty and intellect and wealth—but of a somewhat pious temperament. It was what I call the disease of piety, born from physical weakness of the nerves. They were utter-

ly unfit to live together; he, robust and fearless, but savage through his physical ailment: she, a nervous creature, to whom, a ray too much of sunshine, or a note too much of music would be a positive distress.

"They separated. I don't think they had any children. He went in for all sorts of excitements. He threw away the greater part of his estate at the gaming-table; then he tried keeping race-horses, with the hope of recovering himself: and you may easily imagine the result. Then he went in for railway and joint-stock speculation—and I believe he is there now. Perhaps that is what he wants to talk to Algernon about."

"You would rather not tell me his name?" I said.

"Not to-day—you will know it soon enough."

"Does he know you personally?"

"O yes, and I mean presently to take an opportunity of speaking to him, if I get a chance. To say truth, Rex, I am not over-pleased to see this man here, so intimate with your father and brother. They are able men of business, no doubt: but his cunning and plausibility are quite without parallel. What I think of doing is, to meet him as if by accident, and see if I can elicit from him any hint or outline of his plans."

This was accepted as really a first-class idea: I knew Perivale's wonderful talent well, and trusted him fully, so I said,

"Do as you like: only don't waste too much time upon it, to Dot's detriment."

Whereon Dot pinched me severely.

That afternoon I rode over to Five Tree Hill, and saw my Grace on the lawn at Beau Sejour for two or three minutes. She

was a little fagged by nursing, and I heartily wished I could help her. Mrs. Smith seemed no better at all, and the child was in real distress: she did not know any of her mother's relations: she did not even know whether her father was dead or alive. It was a lonely position for her; how I wished I had a legal right to help her! I resolved that the attainment of such a right should not long be postponed.

Evidently there was something in her mother's illness which embarrassed her, for she told me as little as possible, and she seemed almost glad for me to go away. Well, I could forgive her, knowing there must be some trouble that she could only guess, or that she dared not tell. I did my best in our brief interview to console her, and I think I did not altogether fail. Dear Grace! how her luminous beauty haunted

me as I rode home against the soft south wind.

I had only just time to dress for dinner. Coming in as the company moved, I took down Miss Azura Primer, a tall young lady, with the most audacious assumptions and the most ineffable ignorance that ever were combined. She was sallow, freckled, lean, bony, awkward. She informed me that she was chairwoman of a School Board (at least she would have said so if School Boards had been invented), and that she had written a treatise on the Integral Calculus. I listened as little as possible: it was a large party, which I hate. I amused myself with a slice of undercut of sirloin, and with watching Dot and Perivale, who were happily niched together, a little farther up on the other side.

These huge parties are an abomination

when they come often. If the dinner is a nuisance, the withdrawing room is worse. I do not endorse Mr. Austin's line . . .

"Where the half-drunk lean over the half-dressed,"

for drinking too much is a rare offence—I sometimes think only too rare. *In vino veritas.*

The billiard and smoking-rooms also become an abomination when a large country house is very full. The bad play in the former—the stupid and sometimes vulgar talk in the latter—are enough to make a man despise and even detest his species. As I walked off to my room that evening, I ejaculated . . .

"Ah, my dear father, if I succeed you here as manager of affairs, I won't fill my house so full, and I'll choose my people better."

The fact is, my father has always been too

good-natured. It is a miracle it didn't ruin him. Perivale came to see me just as I had got into my dressing-gown, and had lighted a cigar and taken down a volume of Swift.

"I'll have a cigar with you, Rex," he said. "Just one, and a final drop of Cerevisia Hibernica. Look here, I have been talking to Mr. Johnson. He recognized me; he begged me not to tell anybody who he is. He innocently told me all his plot. Shall I reveal?"

"It is a subtle case of casuistry," I gravely said. "It may be resolved on the ninth formula of Adrianus de Verona: '*Whosoever obtaineth a secret which is important to a friend, should at once communicate it to his friend.*'"

"You may laugh," he said. "Now look here. There is, from Mr. Johnson's confi-

dential statements to me, a scheme between your father and Algernon and him to carry out a double marriage. He is to marry Kitty."

"Nonsense," I said. "Kitty is yours."

"Ah," he replied, with a melancholy look, "that's the scheme, I assure you."

"Dot and I will upset that scheme, my dear Eustace, I can tell you. I don't understand my father's weakness, except that he has come to believe Algernon infallible. I'll soon set that right, old boy. What else?"

He grasped my hand, gratefully.

"Well," he said, "your brother is to have Mr. Johnson's daughter as a per centage on the negotiation."

"Will she be rich?"

"By-and-by, I believe. But then, you know, Mr. Johnson is . . ."

"Who the devil is Mr. Johnson?"

"*The Earl of Lesbury.*"

It struck me like a shot. Several things became clear at once.

"Go to bed, old fellow," quoth I to the Q.C. "I must think this over. I can foil them."

CHAPTER XIV.

SHARP WORK.

"What thou doest, do quickly."

I SUPPOSE I inherit some of my father's promptitude. I thought this matter out. I did not go to bed. Early in the morning I ordered out a waggonette and a pair of horses and drove over to Five Tree Hill. I saw Grace. Her mother was better, but still very unwell: indeed it was clear enough that her ultimate recovery was impossible. However, to-day she was quite cheerful, and very willing that my beautiful darling should taste the fresh air in my company.

We went down to Saint Apollonia's Chapel. Doubtless the saintly destroyer of neuralgia looked kindly upon us that day.

Ah, it was a merry morning. The lark sang in the very same note as when Romeo mistook him for the nightingale. Grace was as happy and as gay as that wild soarer to the sky. I thought of Goethe's lyric:

"O maiden! maiden!
How love I thee!
How shine thy sweet eyes!
How lovest thou me!

"So the lark loveth
Air and wild song,
And the morn-music
Heaven's clouds among."

It is not every day one meets the absolutely simple and innocent child who has never learnt to reason, but whose atmosphere is purity, and whose instincts are love and disdain.

We wandered along the rivulet's marge:

ah, how often had I wandered that self-same way with Mavis Lee! But change had come over the scene: I thought of the immortal Persian wanderer who found a city where there had been the sea when he last went that way, and a few centuries later a forest where there had been the city. I am afraid my darling Grace often found me dull: for my fancy would often go off into the past, and my casuistic intellect would perplex me as to my proper relation with Mavis Marchmont—my pupil of Five Tree Hill, my mother now.

Of course I understood, since my talk with Perivale, why Grace was so like my lost Lucy. She was her granddaughter. Perchance, I thought, Lucy's lovely spirit had passed into the daughter of her son. If so, how well should I be rewarded for my sad loss in the olden time! But to verify this

idea there was no way. The soul loses its memory in its transit. My exceptional case had few precedents . . . if any since Pythagoras.

"Grace," I said, after plentiful pleasant nonsense, "you and I are very good friends, but I have never asked you a question which I have long decided to ask you. I have put off asking it because I think I know what the answer will be. But now there is a reason why I must ask you at once."

The beautiful girl was sitting on a grassy knoll beneath an oak of wondrous girth. She had taken off her gipsy hat, and was swinging it by its ribbon. She looked at me with a merry defiant smile, but said nothing.

"If I ask you a question, will you say *yes* whatever the question is?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" she said, putting her

pretty little pink hand in mine. "O, I know your question, and I know the answer—and you may talk as much as you like, but I understand what your eyes say. Now, sir, if you want me, here I am; if you don't, throw me away."

How lovely she was, with her pretty gesture half-love and half-defiance!

"Grace," I said, holding her hand, and looking into the lucid depths of her luminous eyes, "you won't be frightened, will you, at what I want you to do?"

"Frightened!" she answered. "No, Rex, *you* won't frighten me. I will do anything you command."

"You will marry me to-morrow, and say nothing about it."

"What fun! Where is it to be? I am quite ready."

The affair was easily settled. I got home to dinner, having arranged to meet her next

day and drive her to Redborough, having also made the requisite arrangement for a special license. I was quite resolved not to lose this beautiful heiress of Lucy's wondrous charms: I was delightedly resolved to foil my brother Algernon.

The evening was dull to me, but rather pleasant, I think, to most of the company; for the jovial Bishop was there, who played croquet and chess, who made epigrams and enigmas, who in fact established the Church on a basis wholly his own. Here is a charade which he wrote in Dot's album that evening:

"Ah, fiercely my First
Has demolished the foe,
When the wild battle-thirst
Brought ineffable woe.

"Ah, slowly my Second
Demolished my First:
My Second is reckoned
Of evils the worst.

" Ah, my Whole you will curse,
Though your taste of it's cursory:
It makes everyone worse
Save small folk in the nursery."

There was much quiet confabulation between Algernon and "Mr. Johnson," but I took no notice of them, and amused myself in my own way. Most of the evening I spent with my mother; and when, rather late, I took her candle to her own apartment, I told her I meant to marry next day —the *same* day, I ought to have said, for midnight was past. I explained to her that the marriage was to be a profound secret, as yet, telling her partly why. She consented to keep the secret; I went off to find my Lady Grace. Lady Grace Lesbury! By Jove! it sounds uncommon well. Lady Grace Marchmont is not bad. I was at Five Tree Hill a great deal earlier than was necessary that morning: but the right time

came, and I drove Grace into Redborough, and the parson and the license were both there.

How surprised she was when I told her who she was, and that she must sign her name *Grace Lesbury!* She knew that there was something strange in the relations between her father and mother; she knew that the latter had endured great suffering through her husband's treatment; she had sometimes doubted whether her name was really Smith. But hers was no inquisitive temper, and she loved her mother too well to trouble her with questions: so she was ignorant of her real name and rank till I of necessity had to tell her.

"So you see I am running away with an Earl's daughter, Grace," I said.

She answered with a loving look, and signed her new-discovered name with a hand that did not tremble.

I drove Grace home toward Beau Sejour in capital time for breakfast. What a jolly drive it was! There was to be perfect secresy, and she was discreet. I dropped her quietly near (not too near) Five Tree Hill, giving her instruction what to do amid all conceivable circumstances. She liked the fun extremely. I was back at Romayne Court, important as had been my business, before the general folk down to breakfast. Our matutinal habits, as I think has been remarked, were always free and easy; they are free and easy now, dear reader, as you may see for yourself if you like to call and investigate the subject.

Now, having made the winning move on the chess-board, I could watch with considerable amusement the politics of the other players. It was odd that so acute a man as my brother Algernon had left the lady quite out of his scheme, taking for granted that she

would do exactly what he wished without the slightest recalcitration: but it was one of a thousand proofs within my own knowledge that the men who understand finance are not the men who understand women. Algy had made Lord Lesbury's acquaintance, and helped him out of some of his difficulties, and received promise of Lady Grace as a reward. That, I found, was the state of affairs. The Earl's notion of marrying Dot was of mixed origin: he saw the child was excessive in beauty: he heard that she would have money. The Earl's existence had been a chronic cry for pretty girls and more money.

It was rather odd that in the course of the day my father opened again on the subject with me. I was reading quietly in the library when I heard his step.

"Studious as usual," said my reverend

sire, who would never open a book if he could help it, and who was on his way to the girls at the archery. "You ought to grow very wise in time, Rex. When do you think of being more practical? When do you propose to get married?"

"I should like to find a wife like my mother, sir," I (the married man) hypocritically said.

"I wish you could," he answered. "As you cannot, what do you think of doing?"

"I think of waiting," was my reply. "There is no hurry in my case. It is probably more important that Algernon should make a good match. He understands those things. When he has a big house close to Hyde Park, and his wife gives parties at which one meets Royal Highnesses, he will be happy. That is not my idea of happiness, but I know the world would deem me a fool."

"What is your idea of happiness?" said my father, rather sharply.

"Perfect independence," I replied. "Enough to live upon, and sufficient common sense to despise a fool, even though he is a lord. If I cannot have enough to live on by inheritance I am prepared by manual labour to earn enough to live upon. Still I have no wish for a future of manual labour."

My father laughed in his pleasant easy way.

"You shall have all I can give you, Rex; but how much it will be, I can't guess, for everybody's on strike. I like your independent style. I have always wished I could live a life beyond the reach of ordinary ideas —a poetic life, I may say—but the chance has never been given me. Now that you have a little time to spare, you might inquire whether a poetic life is possible."

"Any life," I said, "is possible to a man

of sound mind, under any conditions. Our chief troubles are due to the maladies and follies which we inherit from our forefathers. I don't myself complain, but ninety-nine souls out of a hundred are uncomfortably wedged into very close quarters, because the said souls left nothing in the way of space for the tailors. I suppose the modern English tailor is the acme of trading fools."

"Tailors are like the church," said my father, "you must respect them, or you will be set down as a heretic. Go to a good church in a gentlemanly costume, and your fortune is made. But now, Rex, tell me something about yourself. What do you think of doing?"

"Nothing at present, sir, thank you: the weather is too hot. Do you really mean, in such frightful weather as this, to enter the archery ground? The girls in green seem

to like it: but I have observed that heat and cold do not affect unmarried ladies, when the opposite sex is near."

"Rex, you won't be serious," said the head of the house of Marchmont. "I've a great offer for Kitty that will make her a peeress. I want you to show her the wisdom of accepting it."

"My dear sir," I said, "have you forgotten that you accepted Perivale as a suitable husband for Dot? They are engaged, if I understand aright? Do you want me to have to fight a duel with Perivale? He won't stand any nonsense, that I know."

"It would be folly," rejoined my father, "to let her marry a barrister, when she can be Lady Lesbury to-morrow. Lord Lesbury is perfectly willing, and he wishes that at the same time his daughter should marry Algernon. It will be a double family arrangement."

My father was evidently so strong in favour of what he imagined a grand alliance (though I never have been able to understand the middle-class mania for pauper peers and bankrupt barons), that he was willing to throw our beautiful Dot into Lesbury's lap. Lesbury was a poet: granted. Lesbury was a patrician: granted. Lesbury was young for his age: granted. My theory is that, for all this, he was neither poetic nor aristocratic nor young enough for Dot. I told my father what I thought as mildly as I could. He still deemed it Dot's duty not to refuse a peer. Odd that a man of wonderful common sense should desire to wed his only daughter, a beautiful and accomplished girl, to a worn-out old nobleman.

This sort of thing proves that the aristocratic idea has not yet reached the dense depths of the common English intellect. Ah, but what is the aristocratic idea?

CHAPTER XV.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

"What can ennoble sots or slaves or cowards?
Alas! not all the blood of all the Howards."

THIS couplet, which (to illustrate forensic literature) Mr. Kenealy quoted inaccurately, and the Lord Chief Justice attributed to Byron, came into my mind as I talked to "Mr. Johnson." How is one to account for a fellow like Everard, Lord Lesbury, being the son of such a noble couple as my old friend and Lucy? Curious are the transformations of life; only to be

accounted for, whatsoever Mr. Darwin may say, by the theory of divine interference. Years ago I bought in Saint Martin's Lane six tumbler pigeons, four blue and two almond: I see their descendants now upon my roof... they are all white. Why? Why am I the only member of my family who ever wrote a line of verse? Is there a law to explain these things?

> "O Fancy, what an age was *that* for song!
> That age when not by *laws* inanimate,
> As men believed, the waters were impelled,
> The air controlled, the stars their courses held;
> But element and orb on *acts* did wait
> Of *Powers* endured with visible form!"

So Wordsworth: who indeed has dealt with the question in his very highest mood in the immortal sonnet beginning "The world is too much with us." The tendency of theorists nowaday is to refer everything to *law*. Who ordained the law? Who

evolved cosmos from chaos? 'Tis the old story: if the world rests on a colossal elephant, and the elephant on a gigantic tortoise, what supports the tortoise? I, who can hear the voice of God in the rustling lime-leaves, and see his finger in the wind-driven clouds, am not concerned to argue with scientists who have fewer faculties than mine. You cannot teach a blind man colour, or a deaf man music.

Here is Lord Lesbury. What with his Earldom, and his fine patrician style, and his youth-won renown, he fascinates everybody. He conquers my father: he almost conquers Uncle Paul: my mother and Dot don't quite like him. Women have a finer instinct than men in such matters: yet even women are sometimes apt to blunder, and to accept a man on the strength of his title and rent-roll, his castle

and family diamonds. I wouldn't have answered for Dot if she had not previously encountered her ugly, able Queen's Counsel.

As the days passed on, there were conferences among the conspirators which I unnoticingly noticed. Lord Lesbury had frightened his wife, who was weakened by ill-health, into a state of absolute subjection. This I learnt from Grace, whom I saw every day in the ancient cemetery by Saint Apollonia's Chapel. We enjoyed that time, with all its complexities. We were man and wife, and could laugh at the plotters who strove to put my beautiful girl in other hands. Poor Algernon! I verified my nickname, and was Rex this time at any rate. Grace and I wandered where Mavis and I had wandered . . . ah, how long ago! Memory of that sweet old time blended with present enjoyment, as the thought of

yesterday's saffron sunset blends with the delight of to-day's unclouded noon: and to me it was unutterable pleasure that Grace would know Mavis—that I should be the link between them.

Dot soon came to me, telling her troubles. Papa had been lecturing her, she said, on the wisdom of becoming a peeress. Countess of Lesbury, she would have a house in Park Lane. Countess of Lesbury, she would be a leader of fashion in London. The Earl's fame and the Countess's brilliant beauty would be without parallel. This was how they tempted Dot . . . but Dot was true to her Queen's Counsel.

The Q.C. had been obliged to return to London after a day or two at Romayne Court: so I had little Kitty on my hands, and felt those hands tolerably full. What I could not easily decide was the best way

to get Dot out of danger. Lesbury pursued her all day long, and she would come to me almost hysterical after the interviews with him which she could not escape without offending my father. O how sentimental the old fox was! I pitied Dot, but I could not quite see the best way out of the affair. I did not want to quarrel with my father, whose kindness of heart was so true and thorough that it seemed a shame to thwart him. Yet he must be thwarted eventually. Dot must be Mrs. Perivale, and not Lady Lesbury.

Lesbury went over to Five Tree Hill one morning. I happened to know that he was going, for I went rather late to the stables the evening before, to look at a young horse that seemed rather weak in the fetlock. I was trying to get a good team for a four-in-hand. It was a fancy of my father's, who, however, knew nothing of

horses, and had not nerve to drive. I, having driven four when George the Third was King, rather liked the idea. I had four chestnuts, beautifully matched, and was afraid that this fellow, whom I had tried as off-leader, was likely to break down. Hence I chanced to be in the stables when the head-groom was leaving; and his last words had reference to a close carriage being ready for Lord Lesbury next day at ten, to go to Five Tree Hill. I found my young chestnut in good form, so I told the man in charge to have the drag ready at the stables at the same hour. I thought I would have a little fun. I saw Dot that evening: she was in white muslin, and looked exquisite: she had just been singing for my father, who loved her clear contralto voice, a favourite song. The echo was in the air as I entered the room, where my

mother was lounging in an easy-chair, while Lesbury, an ancient beau, turned over Kitty's music. The words were something like this:

"July becomes December,
And fever turns to fret;
I wish I could remember,
Or else I could forget.

"Who was the little fairy
I madly used to woo?
Her name perhaps was Mary:
Her eyes perhaps were blue.

"No more my hot heart kindles
At the sweet darling's name:
Love's mighty sunlight dwindles
Into a rush-light flame.

"Ah, sweet, sweet, sweet, I found them,
The maiden lips I kissed:
Now cruel time has drowned them
In melancholy mist.

"In this old heart's dull ember
Some fire is lurking yet:
I wish I could remember . . .
I wish I could forget."

This was the little half-sad half-cynical song which Dot was finishing as I entered: I

write it from memory, so, if I have misquoted, I hope for the versifier's pardon. It seemed to me that it had a moral for Everard, Lord Lesbury, but he did not wince.

This man was playing a curious game. He wanted to marry Dot, for reasons already stated: he offered his daughter as a wife for Algernon, as a bribe. But there was a difficulty. His wife was alive: she was not likely to live long: and he had married her in such a way that he thought it possible to prove the marriage a nullity. What should he do—wait for her death or disown her? The former course would try his patience: the latter might make my brother Algernon unwilling to marry Grace. I, at this time, was slightly uncertain whether Mrs. Smith was really Countess of Lesbury (or "Mrs. Johnson"), though inclining to

believe she was: but it made no difference to me in regard to my darling little wife. How should it concern me whether, being the daughter of an unscrupulous scoundrel, she was legitimate or illegitimate?

I saw old Lesbury's carriage and pair pull up at the front entry. He got in, scowling as if he were off on some business he did not like, and was driven away. By my instructions, a pair of slow old horses had been put in the carriage: and I had great satisfaction in depicting to myself Lord Lesbury chafing at their tardy movement.

When he was gone, I went down to the stables. My team was ready. A couple of grooms got up behind. One, little Burns, a Scotch Irishman, was unequalled at telling a lie, grooming a horse, and blowing a horn. Off we went, fourteen good miles an hour,

and soon passed Lord Lesbury. At the gate of Beau Sejour I descended.

Grace was on the lawn, in a garden hat, culling flowers with garden scissors, looking as Eve would have looked in Paradise if petticoats had been invented. She ran to me, my sweet maiden wife, with a happy smile. I said,

"Darling, how is Mamma?"

"Fancy," she replied, "Mamma is gone to London! Her lawyer came down to see her the day before yesterday—such a nice old gentleman! Papa is very wicked: he has been trying to prove they were never married. But the lawyer has found out something that made Mamma quite cheer up again. So she went to London to see the clergyman that married her; only think—he's a bishop now."

"Well, Grace," I said, "this *is* amusing!

Your amiable father is on his way here at this moment. I don't know what he wants. I suppose to frighten your mother."

"Oh, I can't see him," said Grace.

"No, beauty—not a bit of it. Pack up some trifles as fast as you can, and come with me. I want to get you away from here before Lord Lesbury arrives."

Off she tripped. What a sweet innocent thing! What a flower of merry maidenhood! Faith, I have had my experiences: and nothing do I know more beautiful than a boy before he fancies himself a man—a girl before she fancies herself a woman. This little wife of mine was only a girl. She will be a richer riper rarer creature when she is a woman: but now that she is only a rose-bud (a white rose-bud, red at the core) O, how sweet she is!

Soon she returned. I found no difficulty

in lifting so light a creature to the box-seat by my side. Away went the team at no end of a pace; and we passed Lesbury a mile from Five Tree Hill; and we drove merrily up to the front of Romayne Court, Burns blowing his horn with Hiberavian energy.

My father had gone to Redborough to the petty sessions. My mother, they told me, was in Kitty's hexagonal room; giving the child a lecture, I assumed. What was their colloquy about, I wondered. That my mother did not like Lesbury, and did like Perivale, I knew full well.

"Come, Grace," I said, and led her up the stately stair, and along a wide corridor which led her to Dot's turret room. Now I wish I could describe Grace as at this moment she seemed. The sweet strong living love in her was like the light in a lamp; her eyes brightened with it, her face flushed with it, her hands

trembled with it, her heart beat with it. As we passed along that corridor, her wonderful eyes looked into mine with a passion of power: they seemed to say—*Love!* Love! Yes: it was then I fully learnt that love is pleasure and power, that love is virtue and vigour, that love is the singer's sweetness and the soldier's strength. Grace has eyes that talk, and their talk is music and wisdom. My mother and Dot were talking in the window marked A B in the diagram. Both rose from the window-seat as we entered.

"Your wife?" said my mother. "My dear child! Dot, here is a sister for you."

Poor dear Dot was taken by surprise. Ah, but to see Mavis Marchmont, mother of mine, looking into the eyes of Grace, questioning her wordlessly, trying to find out whether she was really good enough (being

indeed a world too good) for this scapegrace son of hers.

It often puzzles me that both my father and mother like me better than Algy, though he is so decided a success and I am so decided a failure. I try to account for my mother's preference because she was my pupil: but my father perfectly perplexes me.

Dot and Grace soon got as playful as a couple of fawns. There was tea for the probably exhausted Grace—orange-pekoe in dainty Du Barry china. My mater, knowing all about it, petted her intensely.

I got into her neighbourhood and emitted a whisper while Dot and Grace were laughing over their dainty refreshment.

"Mamma," said I, "I want Grace to stay here to-night. She is my wife, you know. I want to show her, as my wife, to my father and Lesbury."

Mavis, *mater mea*, ordered the choicest suite of rooms to be ready. I took Grace to them. I caught her in my arms. What, think you, she said . . .

"O Rex!"

And then I had to warn her that at dinner she would have to meet not only my father, but her own.

"I shall be quite brave with you, Rex," she said.

And she fulfilled her promise.

CHAPTER XVI.

FATHER AND SON.

ASTROLOGOS.—Confound that son of mine, he does astonish me.

ALOUETTE.—Daughters would do the same, sir, if they had the chance.

The Comedy of Dreams.

DISCOMFITED returned Lord Lesbury. Tired returned my father, having helped to adjudicate in two cases of unlawfully cutting furze, and three of bastardy. Neither looked quite happy when they entered the withdrawing room before dinner. I was there; not in a dress coat, which I have always hated, but in a black velvet slouch,

and a general Bohemian touch. But Grace made up for short-comings of mine. Mavis and Dot had perfectly idealized her. Dear Mamma was an artist herein, and made Grace twenty times as pretty as she was—which indeed was not at all necessary. What coral blossoms in her soft brown hair! What pure round pearls upon her pure young neck! You should have seen Lesbury glare at his daughter when he found out who she was.

I suppose it was hardly fair to my father, but I had made up my mind to carry out my design with a high hand, and I know very well that he would ultimately think I had done wisely. As he entered the room I went forward to met him with Grace on my arm.

"This is my wife, sir," I said . . . "Lady Grace Marchmont. I was obliged to marry

without consulting you, but I think you will find her a dutiful daughter."

My father, though taken by surprise, was equal to the occasion. It did not occur to him that Grace was the lady whom he had designed for Algernon. There was no opportunity for any explanation between him and Lord Lesbury. The Earl glared; but my father simply said . . .

"I commend your choice, Rex."

Then he took Grace's hands in his, and looked at her for half a minute, and kissed her on the forehead.

"I hope Rex is good enough for you," he said.

My father has his faults: who has not? Great faults can only accompany great powers. My father has neither one nor the other, but he has courage and kindness and self-reliance in perfection. He is incapable

of being afraid of a man or out of temper with a woman. When he saw Grace he fell in love with her at once, and he never after altered his mind.

My uncle entered the room at this moment, and I went through an introduction with him also.

"Well, Rex," he said, "you are fortunate, and deserve your fortune. Does he not, Charlie?"

"I think so," said my father. "I have not asked any questions yet. We will hear the romance after dinner."

"Are you sure there is any romance, sir?" I asked.

"Quite sure. Rex, you rascal, if there isn't a romance I'll disinherit you."

We were forgetting the Earl all this time. He thought we were in a conspiracy against him—that this was premeditated insult.

While we were all talking, and every eye was fixed on my beautiful Grace, this morose old nobleman had gradually edged toward the door. Anger and shame blended in his humour. He could not remain in his daughter's presence. Unobserved he left the room, meeting, as I afterwards heard, Algernon at the door. They hurried away together, and Lord Lesbury made up his mind to leave the house at once.

Just at this moment came the announcement that dinner was served. My father, though surprised at the absence of the Earl and my brother, would not wait for them: so we sat down to our soup, and soon warmed into a merry party. In honour of my wife the choicest champagne in the cellar flowed freely. It was as joyous a party as I remember.

When we came to the dessert, and the

servants had left us, my father said . . .

"Now for your romance, Rex; but first, why have Lesbury and Algy deserted us? I can see it has something to do with your adventure."

"My wife was Lady Grace Lesbury, sir," I said.

My father laughed immoderately, and we all caught the contagion.

"By Jove, Rex, you've stolen a march on us all! Why didn't you tell me? We might have had a grand wedding."

"I don't care about grand weddings," was my reply. "Give Dot as grand a one as you please when she marries Perivale."

"Why, I thought she was to be Countess of Lesbury," quoth uncle Paul.

"The objection to that," I said, "is that there is a Countess of Lesbury already, and a very charming lady she is."

My father, a quiet and even-tempered man amid common circumstances, was apt to get very fierce when he deemed himself insulted. His face assumed a sterner look than ever I remember: he said to my uncle,

"Paul, find out for me what has become of the Earl."

My uncle went, and we for a while were silent. Kitty looked very much relieved, and gave me a grateful smile. My mother seemed amazed—an appreciative spectator of a curious little comedy. There are people who can regard the current of life as if they were sitting in the stalls of a theatre, opera-glass in hand, a white satin bill of the play before them, a pleasant wit-lightened supper ready when the curtain falls. Such folk not only enjoy existence themselves, but amazingly enhance the enjoyment of others. The simplest thing delights them—the flight of a

swallow, the phases of a sunset, the ripple of a stream. You cannot help seeing with their eyes. They drop indolent epigrams as the princess in some fairy tale dropt diamonds whenever she spoke.

Presently my uncle returned, and with him Algernon. My brother looked a little puzzled and a little frightened.

"I have been seeing Lord Lesbury off, sir," he said to my father. "He insisted on going."

"Did he leave no message?"

"None."

My father turned to my wife and said,

"I will not say a word against the Earl in his daughter's presence. Now that he is gone, let us enjoy ourselves, and forget any trifling annoyance. Come, Algernon, let me introduce you to your brother's wife, Lady Grace Marchmont. I had no idea

you were to be rivals. Rex is no laggard in love, you see."

"I never got a chance," quoth my brother, laughing—for my father's good-humour was resistless. "I have lost my bride, and I have lost my dinner."

"Have something devilled," was the reply, "and drink some Burgundy with it, and you will soon forget your losses."

"I think," said my mother, "that, as this is Rex's bridal night, we ought to let the servants have a dance in the hall. That is an easy entertainment."

"Admirable notion, Mavis!" said my father. "We'll take a stroll in the moonlight while they get ready, and Algy eats his disconsolate devil. Come, Grace, wrap yourself up: I want to talk to you. You will tell me the romance more eloquently than Rex."

CHAPTER XVII.

SIR ROGER DE COVERLEY.

"What would Sir Roger de Coverley be without his follies and his charming little brain-cracks?"

THACKERAY.

WE went out upon the pleasant terrace —not my mother, who was rather afraid of evening air, but my father and Grace, uncle Paul and I. The lights of Redborough lay in the valley beneath us, faint in comparison with the lights of heaven above. A crescent moon, thin and bright, lay low in the west; the milky way was clear; Mars burnt red near the zenith. I thought of the day when I had seen the

light of Earth from the Peak of Power, and fell into so deep a reverie that I hardly knew my uncle Paul was talking to me as we stood by the parapet. He recalled me to myself by a laugh, and said,

"Why, Rex, you haven't been listening a bit. Are you star-gazing or wool-gathering?"

"Both, I suppose. I wish I could read the stars. But really I beg your pardon. What were you saying all the time?"

"O, I was only asking questions you did not answer, and making suppositions you did not contradict. What in the world brought you into contact with your charming bride? The whole affair seems mysterious."

"We are all in the groove of destiny," I replied. "If we could analyse the relations which exist between past and future—be-

tween one individual and the rest of the race—we should cease to be surprised at what we call strange chances and singular coincidences. If I dared tell you my own actual experience, you would either think me mad, or entirely reconsider your philosophy.

"Some day, perhaps. Just now I need only relate the very simple series of incidents which my father styles my romance. I met Grace by what we call accident, living incognito with her mother. I loved her without knowing who she was. I married her promptly, because I saw there was a plot to give her to Algernon, and had no wish for a long and tiresome contest. Her mother, Countess of Lesbury, knows nothing of it yet; she is in London on legal business, trying to foil the schemes of her rascally husband. To-morrow she returns; and I

must go over and make my peace with her."

"What is she like?"

"She is simple and quiet; what most struck me in her was her being so absolute a lady. You see, she has been a confirmed invalid—from trouble, I suspect, more than anything; and now that she is in a fair way, as I hear, to foil Lesbury's schemes, I predict that she will grow young and lively again."

"Where is she living?"

"At a place called Beau Sejour, on Five Tree Hill—a quaint irregular cottage."

"Why," said my uncle, "I fancy it must be your father's property. I know it did belong to the Romayne estate. There's a curious story about it that I heard one day from an old fellow at the Romayne Arms, when I was riding that way, and I was

driven in by a sharp shower. Strangely enough, both the Lesbury family and your mother are connected with it."

"What is it?" I asked, eagerly.

"There was a curious recluse living there for many years, who had been a very fast man in town in George III.'s time. He was a baronet—Sir Edward Ellesmere. He died there, and during his last illness was nursed by Lady Lesbury, your wife's grandmother of course. She was then a widow, and the rumour was that they had been lovers in youth. Any way, the end was romantic enough; he died, and she was found dead by his bedside, holding his hand. The story seemed so strange that I wrote to *Notes and Queries* about it, and got some imperfect verification. Is it not curious that Lady Lesbury should live where the last Lady Lesbury came to die?"

"Very: but what were you saying about my mother?"

"Why, the oddest thing is that she also lived at Five Tree Hill when she was a girl, and that this whimsical old baronet had a great fancy for her, and used to teach her out-of-the-way things, some of which she has taught you, I believe. He left her some property—I don't exactly know what: your father never talks about such things. You must acknowledge it is a curious circle of coincidence."

"We'll talk it over some other time, my dear uncle," I said. "I knew all this before, but I wanted to hear your version of it. Come, the moon has gone down, and there is a cloud over Mars, and the milky way is losing its cream, and the fiddles are playing madly in the hall. Let us make my father and Grace go in, else she will be having a

cold, and an influenza honeymoon would be no joke."

"You are full of brain-cracks as a cheese of mites," quoth uncle Paul.

The rising tide of music had also magnetized my father and my wife.

"You are a lucky fellow, Rex," said my father, as we passed on together. "You've got the most charming wife in the world, except your mother."

"Bracket them equal," whispered my uncle. It was very much from the lips of him who had for long years loyally and purely worshipped Mavis Marchmont.

The hall was lighted brilliantly. Servants and near-dwelling tenants (of whom there were many in the Redborough suburb), made quite a crowded party. There was an uproar of cheering when we entered upon a dais which is connected by swinging doors

with the private apartments. My father, leading Grace to the front, said a few clear words (he always talks like a trumpet when addressing a number): and there were cheers, and dancing began.

My father and I led out Grace and my mother. We began with a quadrille, I think; but I don't know, for dancing is that one of the fine arts whose simplest elements perplex me. I like a reel or a country dance, and was glad when, in the small hours, the time came to romp through Sir Roger de Coverley.

During that first dance, amid the din of music and laughter, I managed to say to my mother that uncle Paul had just been telling me about Five Tree Hill, and Sir Edward, and her knowing him, and the curious "coincidence." As I told her, I could see in her eyes the youthful lustre

I so well remembered when she was a gay girl by Saint Apollonia's Tower. She looked a child again. I could not help wondering whether, even in this name, a process could be discovered for renewing youth, or at least recalling age. Persons to whom I have mentioned this theory have said to me they would rather not. I hold that men who do not wish to live long are not worthy to live at all. We have been told that youth is a slumber, manhood a struggle, old age a regret. Pshaw! Youth is a lyric, manhood an epic, age a philosophy. Youth is prophecy, manhood fruition, age is vision of both past and future. If all men had my experience—which they may if they will—youth and age would be identical. I write this in early manhood, with a thousand things to do in the present which occupy me wholly, and sever me,

save at rare intervals, from the past and future: but, when I was a baby in the cradle, I had time to ponder the past, and when I am half a century older I shall be at leisure to consider the future.

"Ah," said my mother amid the merry noise, "I wish you could have known Sir Edward. I often think you are very like him."

To describe the merriment of the evening is beyond my power. I had planned a stratagem at the last, and arranged it with Mavis and Grace. It was not our wish to take any final leave of the company, or to have old shoes thrown after us for luck, or to go through the ceremony (not yet obsolete, though obsolescent, in outlying regions) of untying the bride's garters. At the same time I did not wish to be conspicuous by my absence before the end came. Grace

and I waited for Sir Roger de Coverley, and led it off together gaily, and then vanished through a side-door and reached our own suite of rooms.

"Tired, Regina?" I said, when we reached a softly-lighted boudoir, and she sank on a sofa.

"A little," she answered. "Is it late? It must be."

It was early—five o'clock.

"Now, darling Grace," I said, "you must go quietly to bed, and as fast as possible. Those dear eyes have burnt so brightly all night that they will lose their radiance if you don't give them sleep. There's no waiting-maid for you; they are all dancing and drinking punch, and eating cold chicken."

She was in bed in two minutes, and fast asleep in five. As I sat by her side with

her hand in mine . . . a little roseleaf of a hand, softer than Minerva's and warm with love . . . I thought of another hand that long ago turned icy cold in mine . . . though love was also there.

"How like and how unlike!
O Death and O Love!"

[illegible]APTER XVIII.

[illegible]UNTESS OF LESBURY.

[illegible] the weak, matures the strong."

[illegible]beetle, whose vagaries dwellers [illegible] country are [illegible] notice in [illegible] a curious [illegible]. He [illegible] summer [illegible] sprightly [illegible] he is [illegible] morn- [illegible] bird or [illegible] him [illegible] of his ha[illegible] [illegible] of his le[illegible] [illegible] which [illegible] [illegible] that [illegible] [illegible] soda [illegible]

way looked the folk at Romayne Court on the following morning. I went downstairs, while my darling slept soundly still, and got a bath, and dressed. Nobody was visible: the servants were doing their matutinal work in a languid way: the old butler, who was just beginning to look after his glass, looked so intensely dissipated, with his dirty white necktie under his left ear, that I fancy my father would have dismissed him on the spot. Luckily Mr. Marchmont was fast asleep, and likely to be for some hours. His habits were not mine. He could sleep ten hours at a time: I have always been thankful if I could get five. I knew full well that he was not likely to appear till midday.

So, as Grace slept on, I drank the delicious freshness of the morning air, filled with fragrance unutterable. Lucy loved

roses, Lucy, my lost love: Grace loved roses too: so when I came to a choice rosary, where the most delightful summer roses were grown carefully, I picked the rarest flowers I could find, covered with crystals of early dew, and took them to my little wife. On my way I was lucky enough to catch a trim little waiting-maid, who was almost half awake, and whom I detailed to wait upon Grace. The country dances had whirled most of the wits out of her empty little brain, but I contrived to make her understand what she was to do, and in due time, when Grace awoke, she got her cup of coffee, and all the other necessities of the morning. She came tripping downstairs presently with some of my roses in her hair, and one sweet maiden-blush in her bosom to match the bridal maiden-blush upon her happy cheek.

"How do you feel, Regina?" I asked, when we came into the garden that delicious morning. "Have you had sleep enough?"

"O quite! O too much, I think. I am ready for anything now, dear Rex. I am glad. I am yours, and that is enough. But we must see Mamma to-day. She is to return in the afternoon, you know. Don't forget, my own."

"O I won't forget, my love: you shall be taken back in good time. After lunch will do, if they ever give us any lunch."

"O I am in no hurry for lunch: they brought me some Strasburg pie with my tea: I couldn't eat anything more. I do hope you have made a good breakfast."

"Capital," I said, though the idea had not occurred to me—though indeed I never eat before noon. Grace was satisfied, and we

wandered down an avenue of lime-trees, and talked the [illegible] unaccountable nonsense which some people [illegible] [illegible] only be talked once in a life-time. [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] if it be [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] nonsense turns to poetry. [illegible] [illegible] and I passed through long alleys of soft light and shade, where sunlight flecked turf and gravel with a mosaic pattern, perpetually disturbed by the gentle wind in the foliage.

Grace sang a little song:

"We once were two; we now are one.
O how sweet is the morning air!
The vow is made; the joy is won;
Ay, and life shall be always fair.

"For I'll love you while shines the sun;
O how sweet is the morning air!
And you'll love me till life is done—
So shall death when it comes be fair."

"I wonder where you got that whimsical little song," I said.

"O, Mamma taught it me. Do you like it? I do. I like the idea that death is nothing to be afraid of."

"Why should it be?" I said. "Nobody need fear it unless he is a scoundrel. We don't know what will happen next, but surely we may trust God."

"Do you know, Rex, it is a thing I have always been thinking of. Somehow the fancy came upon me, when I was quite a little girl, that I should like to know what death meant. If I had not loved all the beauty and delight of life, I should have done something desperate. I imagined another world, wherein there was a freer and happier life than here: but the green of the grass, and the blue of the sky, and the song of the birds, and my dear mother's kind soft voice kept me from doing anything foolish. Only I have not quite conquered

the wish, when I am on the top of a tower or a cliff, to fling myself down. I fancy the swift flight through the air . . . and then . . . another world. So, when I am in a boat on the water, I am longing to plunge into it, and am held back only by the feeling that this world is too pleasant to leave."

"You foolish darling," I said. "I will tell you all about it by-and-by. I know a great deal more than you guess. You won't want to jump off towers, or tumble into the water till you are tired of me, will you?"

"Well, I think not," said Grace, with a charming capricious look. "But hadn't we better go back and see if anybody is up yet? They must be waking by this time, surely."

So we went back through cool alleys, over sunny lawns, till we reached the house, and there, on the terrace, was uncle Paul.

"You are early," he said, with a merry

look, which seemed to insinuate some recondite notion. "It is pleasant to see bridegroom and bride among the leaves and flowers before the dew has left the grass. It shall be deemed a good omen, Rex."

"It shall," I said. "Regina and I, uncle Paul, mean to carry out our names. We mean to rule ourselves entirely, and others when necessary."

"Begin with the first," said Paul Marchmont. "To interfere in your own affairs is unwise; to interfere in another man's affairs is unwiser. The man who goes in for ruling himself has very little to rule."

"Why, uncle Paul," says Grace, merrily, "how can you be satirical, on a lovely summer morning, to a new bridegroom and bride? I am ashamed of you. The very flowers were more fragrant than I ever knew them: the trees whispered secrets to us:

the grass grew cooler to suit our feet. I won't have you in a caustic mood," she continued, with her pretty hand on his coat, that was russet with age (he loved old clothes for sake of ease), and she looked at him so gaily that his cynicism vanished like ice before the sunbeam, and he inwardly swore allegiance to my charming Grace.

Romayne Court resumed its normal look in time, and we got a kind of breakfast-luncheon, and a deal of nonsense was talked among us. I think my father was foremost. His boyhood lasted: he took his son's marriage as he had taken the Stock Exchange—as he had taken a game of cricket in his boyhood. Not the highest idea of life, we may say: but while men like Charles Marchmont can marry women like Mavis Lee, we need fear no worsening of English folk.

In the golden afternoon we drove to

Beau Sejour—my father and Grace and I, that is to say. We reached the dear old cottage just in time: Mrs. Smith had not returned, but was expected every minute. When she did return, and found us in one of the rooms overlooking that sloping lawn, she was a little puzzled: but her visit to London had brightened up her spirits, her lawyer having told her that her case must necessarily go all her own way. I had to make an explanation which might have caused her to be indignant—indeed, she ought, one might think—but I am very happy to say she wasn't. She simply said,

"You were in a great hurry; don't repent at leisure. I have been repenting at leisure all my life."

"I am very sorry, Lady Lesbury," I said; "but there was no escape for me. And as soon as I could get a chance, we came to ask your pardon."

"Yes, Mamma; it is all quite true," said Grace.

"You are a daring boy, I can see," said Lady Lesbury to me, "and I don't quite understand how you found out who I am."

"I think," said my father, "you had better leave this wild fellow to himself. He is my son, and I will be answerable for him. Lady Grace is quite sufficient temptation for anybody. Ladies like you, with daughters almost as pretty as yourselves, have very much to answer for."

It is not requisite to go farther into this part of the history. Lady Lesbury, who was well satisfied with what I and her daughter had done, and who was glad to come out of her retirement now that she found that Lesbury had the worst of the affair, surprised us all by the quiet soft dignity of her manner, and the ease with which

she encountered this new phase of her existence. Her lawyers had completely vanquished Lord Lesbury, putting her in a thoroughly comfortable position, and making Grace an heiress: and Lady Lesbury, thus victorious, verily renewed her youth. She threw away her ailments, and was quite pleased to accept Mamma's invitation, and stay at Romayne Court while Grace and I went on our honeymoon. Perivale and Dot had made up their minds, but their honeymoon time had not arrived.

CHAPTER XIX.

GRACE AND I.

RAFAEL. Well, Alouette, where shall we pass our honey-moon?
Shall we see cities? Shall we chase the marvellous
Beauty of mountains? Shall we hide in forest depths?
Where shall we go to get most lovely loneliness?
ALOUETTE. We'll go to sea.

The Comedy of Dreams.

THERE was some such conversation between Grace and me that next night at Romayne Court, when I held my beauty in my arms, and talked over what we should do next. O how selfish we were, and how little we cared for all our dearest

friends! We had one idea . . . ourselves. We wanted to isolate ourselves, and get out of the way of all the rest of the world. It is a providential sort of thing, say the cynical school, led by Thackeray: let the young people tire each other out. This may be true sometimes, but Grace and I have been one for many a year, and have not tired of each other yet.

I bought a yacht . . . a tolerably fast and very cosy schooner, the *Lydia*. I re-christened it the *Grace*, of course. We had quite a pleasant time when we were making all our arrangements for this voyage: my father and mother and uncle Paul and Lady Lesbury came down to Southsea, and stayed at some "mansion" or other, and we had an immense amount of fun over the matter. I was lucky enough to get a capital master for the yacht: his name was Waring, and he

had been yachting all his life. Such men, like all seamen of the first order, must be gentlemen. There is no university like the sea.

Imagine the world far away. We are in the Mediterranean. Sky and sea are inconceivably blue. We search for islands and adventures, Grace and I, lying cosy amid rugs innumerable, with none but marine and canine companions—the latter being a couple of pure white Newfoundland dogs that I bought at Portsea of an old A.B. turned dog-fancier, who had christened them Jack and Jill. They were brother and sister, a lovely pair.

Our life was strangely pleasant. Morning brought us on deck to breakfast on unusual fish and light wine, and to watch the lovely lapse of water, the delicious curve of shore. I think I could tell more distinctly

what at that time I saw, if I had not been looking so much into Grace's eyes. For to lie at her feet, and to look at her wondrous eyes and sweet little mouth, while she told me me what she saw, while I saw nothing but her, was enough for me. There was a dream of sapphire sea, of marble city, of emerald island, of sky angel-haunted in its deepest blue, but Grace was my reality. There she sate and radiated. Her sweet strong spirit seemed visible to others—was visible to me.

Yes, I told her. I wondered, times without number, whether I should. This is a world in which it is unsafe for a man to communicate a new truth even to his wife. Suppose you had the power, Mr. Brown, of making yourself invisible, would you tell Mrs. Brown, or would you become invisible and leave Mrs. Brown to take the conse-

quences? When we analyse the reasons why men marry women and women marry men, we need not wonder at any unpleasant results. Of course, in the present state of ontological crassitude, people have no chance of marrying as I married: and this true history is written to give men that chance.

Yes, I told her. I thought I might, when I looked on that fine square brow, that soft mouth, curved like Apollo's bow, those eyes, in which dreams were apparent —in which light was latent. I was not wrong.

O, how well I remember the day! There was a merry breeze: we were off Elba. I thought of the imprisoned Emperor, and laughed at the folly of a man who aspires to rule a world so insignificant as ours. Grace was dreamy, enjoying life. I told her what has already been told.

"Ah!" she said, when the story was over, looking westward, where sunshine lay, "always I used to wonder whether we should love again some time. I cannot remember whence I came—you can. Now who was I, I wonder?"

"I don't know, my beauty. You are exactly like Lucy, your father's mother, who died when I died."

"How strange it seems!" she said, with a shudder—I had my arm around her waist —"how strange! I am afraid, Rex. It is more terrible to be told these things that you must believe under a sky like this than to hear some hideous ghost story just before you are going to bed at Christmas. O tell me you are hoaxing me, Rex!—O tell me you are telling stories!"

It has been asked, gravely, what is the chief end of woman; I say, *to surprise man.*

Why in the world should Grace be afraid on board a schooner yacht in the Mediterranean on the loveliest day in the world?

"I am not going to tell you I am telling stories, my beautiful Grace," I said, "because I am telling absolute truth, and because it is truth on an important subject. Now, Grace, you foolish pet, what is there to frighten you in what I have told to you, and to nobody else? I loved your grandmother years ago: you are just like her: you are my wife. The dear creature whom you know as my mother was my little pet and pupil years ago. It is hard to understand this, Grace, my darling: but if it is all true, why should it frighten you? I am almost sorry I told you, but I regard my wife as myself, and I hate having secrets from her."

She was quiet and thoughtful for a time; then she said,

"Rex, dear, I am very glad you told me. It is rather puzzling to a child like me, you know," she went on, with an enchanting *moue*. "But either you are mad, or what you say is true—and I don't think you are mad, Rex."

"I think not, Grace. I am sane enough. Only I remember what other people forget, and I expect what other people dare not believe. A man who has seen other countries is astonishing to people who have lived in the same street all their lives. I have seen another world, and therefore I frighten you: but you, my dear little flower—my delicate dream of beauty—will see other worlds too, if you have a soul."

Grace was equal to the occasion. Her guitar was by her side, the most elegant instrument a lady can touch. She took it, and sang:

"If I have a soul, Sir!
'Tis thus that men will sneer, and think it droll.
Long as planets roll, Sir,
Woman will have no soul . . . she *is* a soul.

"Have you got a brain, Sir?
That's the keen question which I ask of you.
Girls are very vain, Sir . . .
To men the prize for vanity is due."

I wish I could put the time upon paper. I wish I could sketch Grace, as she lay amid her rugs, with Jack and Jill like two great dogs of snow carved at her feet, as we raced through the Midland Sea's tranquil sapphire.

In the present state of Great British modesty it is hard to put into sufficiently decorous prose anything that bridegroom and bride are likely to say to each other when yachting in the Mediterranean. Although this slightly interferes with the interest of a novel, I, as a moral man, and a

confirmed old fogy, am very glad of it. Those days are past when, with Grace, I sailed the Mediterranean Sea. I am, according to the current chronology, thirty-four. Grace and I have only two children, a boy and a girl, the boy the elder. Looking at these youngsters in the light of my unique experience, I cannot help believing that they are old friends under a new aspect. I study them daily. So does Grace, who has got over her first fright, and begins to think the whole thing delightful.

And it is delightful, as are all things that are true. God meant man to be happy and wise. Thank Him for pain, without which pleasure cannot be truly known. Thank Him for crime, without which we could not know virtue. Thank Him for hatred and darkness, since they teach us to know HIM—who is LOVE and LIGHT!

"Perfect light is perfect love," I said to Grace one day, when we were talking over my strange experience, while my son Harry was trying to break his neck by infantile gymnastics, and my daughter Kitty (could I forget dear Dot, now Lady Perivale?) was worrying her mother abominably. If we knew everything, we could not hate anybody. We shall not reach the absolute enjoyment of existence till a clear light shines through the universe."

"Till Mr. Cook can organise excursions to Mars, I suppose," said Grace.

"You like to laugh at me, darling," I said, "but you know full well that what I have said is true. Between you and me there is perfect light, and therefore perfect love!"

"I wish the world could know what we know," said Grace.

Ah, and how I wish it also. It is four o'clock on a July morning as I finish this narrative. Grace is in bed. She is the only person in the world who knows what I have endured, who knows that I am writing of it. As the names throughout are changed, my father and mother will never guess, if they should see the book: but I confess I am slightly afraid of my uncle Paul's keen intellect. He is almost unfairly incisive.

I have not done with this subject. I am of opinion that any man who attacks the question philosophically may secure a safe passage from the present to the future, even if he know nothing of the past. What I have done others may do. I *know* the soul to be immortal: the unfortunate people who only *hope* that it is immortal may get proof if they go the right way to work. Moreover, you may, by scientific analysis,

trace the soul backward. I have two children, Harry and Kitty. I have traced them backward . . . but as yet the investigation is through three generations only. The completion of the theory can be stated only in a scientific treatise, and would be out of place in a narrative of fact.

Lady Grace Marchmont is no longer frightened by what I have had to reveal to her. She reminds me, as I have heretofore said, by her luminous beauty, by something that seem to show the soul through the flesh, by a thousand little ways, by her power of making roses bloom, by her fanciful sweet songs, of Lucy Lovelace.

It was one winter evening, when, she and I alone together, I had been telling her little things about Lucy, that she said,

"I remember. I recollect when you broke that eggshell china cup, with the gold

[illegible] Yes. [illegible] Lucy [illegible] shall always remember [illegible]

THE END.

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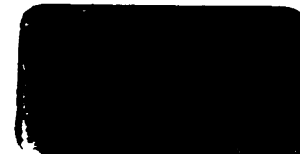
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